the childcare issue

Volume 3 Numbers 2 & 3 February 1973 25¢

about us

We felt some explanation of why we haven't published an issue since August was due. One reason is childcare which was work done by mothers and a few childless women with very little help from the rest of us. But after the last issue some women confronted the rest of the women's community about not doing enough in childcare and since then we have been busy beginning to share that work, helping at a new daycare center in town, doing outside childcare,& meeting with the non-biological mothers groups we formed to help deal with the fears and inadequacies that some of us felt about childcare. We have also been in an upheaval within the AIAW collective. In fall we had decided that our collective needed to be a tight one - a primary collective for all of us and that that would solve the internal mistrust that was coming between us. Well, the process of tightening up the collective (dealing with how we all felt about the group, how we felt about working together) caused so much trauma, that we were forced to reconsider whether at this period in the community a tight closed collective was what we needed. There are a lot of women in the community that we trust and feel close to politically and personally, & although there are times when isolating yourselves is advantageous,our interests currently are much more wrapped up in the women's community here. We share the same struggles as other women in town. We finally reversed directions, calling a meeting of women in the community we felt we could work with to talk about political directions, about what political work we each wanted to be doing, to ask for suggestions about the paper & talk about the idea for this issue. Since the last issue & that meeting several new groups have formed. There are various groups now revolving around the daycare ctr., a group of women printing an anthology of the two women's poetry readings that were held here, & a group planning to start a women's press. The membership of these groups overlaps a lot - over committment is something we can't seem to solve. There is so much we want to do. The AIAW collective has had some changes in membership during this time but still remains pretty small. We all feel that the paper is a good thing because it's the one thing we do that communicates with women who we don't know or work with. But it is difficult to find new women who we could work with who want to join a collective that is 2 yrs. old. The idea of a women's press is new and exciting & the paper is feeling its age. But most of us want it to continue & to somehow serve as a chronicle of the struggles of our community here- to somehow have them recorded, explained, & analyzed. That's why this issue seems important since the struggle over childcare has touched almost everyone in the women's community.

about this issue

All of our time seemed to be consumed with childcare - doing it, worrying about doing it, worrying about not doing it, fighting over it & the meetings to decide what to do about the paper, what to publish, who to work with, seemed distant. Mothers and a few non-mothers had been doing an astounding amount of work on daycare for yrs. & lots of other women in the community were finally getting involved with childcare too, hasseling about it, doing it, or not doing it & feeling guilty, or always doing it & feeling angry. It seemed so logical that what we published should reflect what was going on in the women's community in Iowa City & much of what was/ is going on here revolves around childcare.& everyone has something to say. If you put up a sign at the daycare ctr. about anything, several scribbled answers, a grafitti dialogue, will appear in a couple days time. Those of us working on the paper couldn't possibly present the whole issue of childcare as it concerns this community. Except for two of us, we have just recently got our shit together & started working at it. None of us are mothers. We hung up announcements of this issue asking all the women in the community to write something & decided anything submitted would be printed. We kept copies of all articles handed in in a notebook at the daycare ctr. so everyone could read them. A lot of the copy in this issue is a result of women responding to articles other women wrote. We think all the articles together present a pretty good picture of the issue of childcare as struggled over in the women's community in Iowa City & that's what we wanted to do. Our hope is that people will read the entire paper in sequence cause it is the entirety of the issue that tells the story. What is and has happened here as regards childcare we think is useful to other women in other communities but in some ways our struggles may be different. This community is small and on a whole pretty priviledged, which does not make the lives of poor or working class women here much easier. But being in a priviledged university community does make some things more possible. The university (great white father/employer/landlord/& master of us all) rents out huge bourgey houses for $75 a month because of the pressure put on them & hard work done by women over a year ago, women in the community contribute financially to support the ctr. because so many can afford to do so, & only two weeks after it started it was full of toys, furniture, etc. It's true that some of that stuff was acquired from Goodwill dumpsters but even the dumpsters here are surrounded by goodies to snatch that you don't see around the dumpsters in Chicago or Boston. It was hard work to start the new daycare ctr. but it was possible here. Low income women and/or women in large cities may encounter struggles we glided through or avoided. Most women can't get beyond fighting for the physical facility in which to start a center. But we think our experiences could be helpful & perhaps because our community crosses class lines and involves gay & straight women, a spectrum of community thought presents a fairly accurate anaylsis of an issue that is real important in one way or another to all of us.

mother's manifesto

Mystification of Motherhood

Motherhood is a mystique. It fails to separate the biological function of delivering a child from the social function of care and socialization. The sexual double standard reappears in child care: men threatened with the responsibility simply leave the scene - sometimes physically, sometimes mentally. The woman is left with the burden. Abandonment of children by women is seen as an unnatural, monstrous act. Men abandon children regularly without comparable social disapproval. After birth a child takes on a life of its own. Every function necessary for its survival and growth can be performed by any competent adult.

On Her Own

Those who assume the motherhood role are systematically excluded from employment and participation in any organization or institution outside the home. These organizations, precisely because mothers are an insignificant portion of their membership, are unaware of (or can ignore) the problems of child care. Thus, the exclusion of mothers is self-perpetuating.

How are women with children kept outside the mainstream of society? Children need constant care. When the woman wants to do something else, a substitute must be found. Lack of free, 24 hour child care centers bind women to their children. This lack of facilities is most serious for women who care for very young children, or who cannot afford a babysitter, or who live alone. Even in co-op day care centers, where theoretically there exists an awareness of the need for child care to liberate women, membership have argued for the exclusion of families with diaper-aged children. Take-home pay for most jobs open to women, already low to begin with, is decimated by babysitting fees. Even when other adults are in the household, they seldom provide reliable relief.

Another and more subtle way women are excluded is through scheduling of activities. NUC, for example, (this organization is only typical...most follow the same pattern) arranged as many as four meetings a month at a tavern between five and seven on Friday evenings. Not only was no child care provided, but the time interfered with such routine tasks as providing meals. Those who can afford them argue for babysitters: one day care co-op scheduled six parent meetings with no provision for child care. With babysitting, both parents could attend; without it, only one. Obviously those who hired baby sitters acquired more control.

This is a common syndrome which eventually restricts membership and control to childless, moneyed, and male people.

Yet even when child care is made available for meetings, this is only a minimal attempt to rectify the problem. What of meetings and events scheduled late, or which run to late hours? The childless membership does not get up with the children.

Mothers can never participate fully when commitment requires energy beyond meeting attendance. ALL major time commitments exacerbate housekeeping and mothering tasks. When the woman has a job outside the home (dealing with welfare is a job) the problem is compounded.

Finally, guilt paralyzes most women once they take a step away from home. Children cry, dishes collect, and she wonders if she is doing the right thing. If no one is there to say yes and give support, she will decide No on her own.

Nuclear Family I

What keeps women tied to their biological children? The nuclear family. As long as it is the dominant social and economic unit, women will remain enslaved to the motherhood role. At present each female is personally responsible for the consequences of her biology. Each must negotiate the situation of pregnancy with a single male (father, lover, husband,) or a male institution (adoption agencies, welfare.)

Pregnant women, if not fired outright, are discouraged from working. Teachers in Iowa are retired at their fifth month. Then they are rehired (at one-third pay) as substitute teachers until delivery. Welfare women must often work for unscrupulous people at below minimum wage. The pay loss is compensation to the employer for the "favor" he does her of not reporting the wages to the welfare department. The effect of such treatment is to drive women to be dependent on the greater economic security of males. She stays home while he goes out to earn. He is rewarded for working with money, and gains power and prestige. She engages in unpaid labor - average 99.6 hours per week.

This workload is more than double that of the male.

Nuclear Family II

The woman left in her house with her children has no power to negotiate the terms of her 99.6 hour job with other adults. Her singular responsibility for children leaves her in a position where she can be counted on to work when others prefer not to. The welfare of the children urges her to participate in this arrangement, though it is physically and emotionally damaging. The situation is not better in most collective living arrangements, where supposedly the child care is shared. The attitude remains that the mother has ultimate "say" and responsibility, with no option to neglect "her" duties.

Society provides one major alternative to marriage for economic security: remarriage. Even following the rules of the situation, this is difficult. Thus, alimony and ADC, pittance that they are, hold the survival line for families not headed by a male. Until all women have employment at decent pay, the begging, pleading, and threatening for this survival money will remain and grow as an economic institution.

Economics

Exclusionary practices result in loss of basic learned and social skills - consequently women lose the ability to earn an adequate salary. Projecting personal rather than social responsibility for children maintains the oppression of ALL women. All are treated as potential mothers who must be supported by men. This circumstance is an excuse to keep women out of career-producing areas of education, to employ them marginally, and to pay them minimally. Until economic realities are dealt with, demands of women will be met only under conditions prone to co-optation. Paid maternity leaves, 24-hour child care, salary supplements for child care, paid time off to work in day care co-ops: these demands fall in this category.

Continual dependence on others results in loss of control over one's own life; little opportunity for growth; and a sense of futility and valuelessness in activities. Gay mothers cannot and do not rely on men but on other women for support, when possible. Often gay mothers are forced to rely on welfare, and must "pass" as straight.

Even experience with and ability to care for children is considered of little value. Pediatricians, specially trained teachers, child psychologists - all who generally have little experience outside a specialized area, are looked to as authorities on the subject.

Nuclear family as economic and social unit
+Economic power invested in men
= Women personally responsible for children

Who Owns Children?

The nuclear family as the basic economic unit is the precondition for the belief that children belong exclusively to the family, that is, the property of the male and the responsiblity of the female. In divorce cases, the child becomes the property of the state and is given over to the custody of the mother. As male property, both female and child take his name.

Women are encouraged to measure their success in life through their responsiblity for children. It is no accident many of them try to live vicariously through their children (or through the more powerful husband.) But if mothers fail in child rearing, the community also fails. It is the community, not the individual women, who reaps the benefits of a successfully "raised" child. Societies need children to carry on culture and work. The male social order needs the fruits of, but does not want to tend, the growth of children. Women are persuaded and coerced into the job.

I am a mother
I am a ma
I am am a
I a mama
I am am I?
I am aaaaa...
Janice McKown - Lawrence, Kan

graphic by Sue Negrin from
A Graphic Notebook on Feminism
Times Change Press, 1028 Sixth Ave.
NYC 10018 $1.25

While it is true that relating to children has its moments of ecstasy, it also has moments of hell. Mothers need support and aid from the community--especially from childless members of that community.

Excuses

Often childless adults will refuse to associate with children. "I just don't like being around them." "Sorry, I don't like children." They may as well say they don't like peaches or prunes. This attitude relegates children to the status of objects that can be taken or left. By comparison, such statements as yet fail to evoke emotional reactions, as would "I don't like Blacks." Children, however, ARE people in the same sense as any adult category.

Like adults, children need warming up to. When a person has been dependent on another for a long time, as is generally the case with children, they are threatened by advances from new people. This situation must be struggled with among child, new person, and whoever was the focus of the child's dependency.

Others realize, dimly or clearly, that child care is a drag. They simply don't want to give.
"I'm no good at it."
"I'm so busy!"
"I have more important things to do."
"I don't want to hear about it."

The underlying assumption here is that women choose to have children and should want to take care of them.

A Choice

The "choice" attitude is based on consciousness of what child care involves. Many assume that because THEY at this time, know what child care involves, so did all the mothers, years ago, when they conceived. Therefore, they feel absolved from responsibility. Actually, it is largely a matter of chance which particular women conceive. Consciousness comes with changing social circumstances and experience. Biological ability to become pregnant usually predates having much consciousness of any kind.

Further, the attitude that women choose is both anti-feminist and class-biased. The "choice" depends on:
1. availability of general health and birth control information.
2. total effectiveness of birth control.
3. money for and access to abortions.
4. ability to project divorce, separation, and death.
5. time for and probability of contact with others conscious of what child care involves.
6. support to withstand social pressure to conform to the motherhood role.

All these factors decrease with class status.

Problems of Daycare Co-ops
How They Oppress Women

Even in most progressive of parent-controlled (none are yet controlled in any significant way by non-parents) day care co-ops, individual women definitely bear the consequences of their biology. Volunteers, especially male volunteers, are hard to find and harder to keep. In families with two parents, women most often fill work requirements.

Although child care is for women and children, decisions are not made by them. Men have equal say, which is hardly equitable, since they have different interests from women and children. Given the social order, men command prestige and power. At general membership meetings, some women say nothing. At womens' daycare meetings, these same women say plenty.

Day care co-ops are white, middle-class, university affiliated. There are no child care centers for third-world, lower-class, or non-university women and children.

Co-op membership has been reluctant to deal with issues of classism, racism, sexism, homosexism, and ageism. Consciousness raising, with its probing into personal values and activites, has been firmly resisted.

The parent(s)-child unit remains the principle sub-unit of the co-ops. Childless persons are in a position of having to justify their actions to parents. Little is done to re-socialize children. An illusion of dealing with sex roles is maintained by treating the children "equally". This means encouraging them to be passive. Once in school, boys will be expected to grow away from passivity, and girls will be reinforced in it. Re-socialization of children cannot begin until adults deal thoroughly with their own socialization. This is a long way off.

Womens Movement

Child care is not yet considered a responsibility of the larger feminist community (gay and straight). Children who don't attend day care co-ops are left pretty much with their mothers. Day care was initiated as an important part of the women's movement, yet it is now virtually ignored by most non-mother feminists. Gay and straight women are both guilty. Many gay women have consciously made a choice not to have children as a part of their choice not to relate to men. This should not excuse them from child care responsibilities involving women. If any woman is <u>not sharing</u> child care, she contradicts herself as a feminist.

The isolating quality of child care erodes a mother's ability to deal with other adults effectively. Losing self-confidence and speaking ability, she is easily intimidated by those with more practice.

Women coming to the movement from a housewife/mother situation need encouragement as well as child care. Too often political women react with disgust at unsophisticated viewpoints. It is rare that any group of women considers child care for its membership an important initial concern.

Child care problems must be dealt with by women at this point. This is not, however, the total solution. At such time when men deal with themselves and change(and as they do) childcare will be their responsibility as well.

Oppose Federally Sponsored Daycare

Government sponsored and subsidized day care (as opposed to 24 hour women and children controlled child care) maintains and increases exploitation. Females are " liberated" to work a low-paying job, but resume the mommy role once the job ends. The Family Assistance Plan (FAP) of the Nixon administration is such a scheme: work relief. Women using these centers are doubly burdened.

Federally sponsored day care (already typified by Project Head Start) encourages the belief that biological mothers are responsible for biological children.

Mandates

A. Political priorities must include that 24 hour child care facilities be provided on a widespread basis, free of all cost, to women, particularly to women not yet served. (Non-white, lower/working-class, non-university.) All aspects of child care situations must be controlled by women and children.

B. Collective living situations must be organized as a counter-institution to the nuclear family. Every adult must share equal responsiblity for child care and housekeeping REGARDLESS OF COMMITMENT TO OTHER- INCLUDING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC - ACTIVITIES.

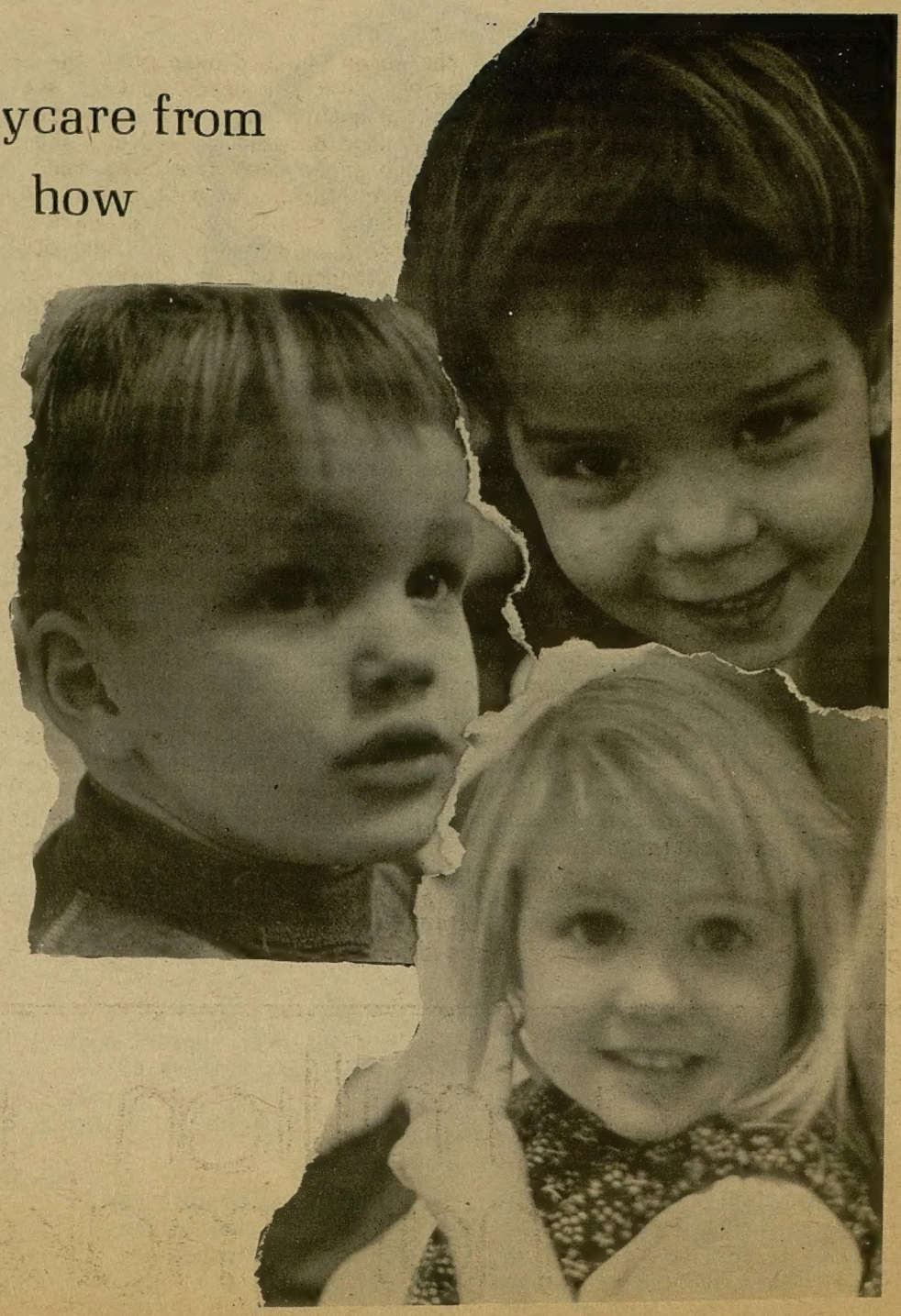
A part of every living situation should be discussion by all leading to consensual agreement on how the children are to be socialized. To fight the children-as-property attitude, and encourage viewing children as people, collective child care should integrate physical, social, and political welfare.

Toward these goals we must engage in the following:

1. CONSCIOUSNESS is a prerequisite to taking direct action. All CR groups must include mothers and must provide child care. Meetings must be scheduled at times convenient for mothers. Groups should not be sedentary but lead to a program of action. Every group member must learn practical aspects of child care and find a situation to apply what she learns. This means taking care of children on a STRUCTURED, reliable basis in a communal living arrangement, in a child care center, or in the home of a woman who needs more help.
2. CR groups must work toward community programs which transcend and incorporate problems of individual women.
24-hour centers
collective living arrangements
paid time off for child care
further formulating and disseminating an analysis of the child care struggle

"Childless" persons already involved should do their own CR and take an aggressive role in this, especially in taking power and responsibility away from biological parents.

what i wrote for this issue on daycare from what i can remember about how i saw it



In the spring of 1970, the Women's Liberation Front in Iowa City split into small cells along interest/project lines. At that time I saw the daycare cell as one of many projects people could choose to do but not as something that everyone should be doing. I chose to work in the publications collective and the publishing of Ain't I A Woman? became my priority. I sort of understood -- but not really -- that when we split into project groups that some of the women who chose daycare did so out of political necessity since they had children and needed daycare. Who knows what their choice would have been had daycare been available to them. Had I had children of my own I too would have been in the daycare cell -- probably never allowing myself to think about whether I wanted to work on a paper.

I did start working one morning a week at Dum Dum, the first daycare center that the WL daycare cell organized and opened. It was a good experience for me learning that I did in fact like kids, that none of the kids died while I was working, that I could learn to change a diaper. I had never been around kids before and certainly didn't completely overcome my fears, but it was a beginning.

It was just around that time that I had broken up with my husband and admitted to myself that I was gay. My hatred and resentment toward men was still sizzling and I found working with men (who were recruited to volunteer at the center) hard and often offensive. I saw no reason at that time (and still don't) to struggle with men in most instances, but I understand now how women who have children to take care of don't see that option (to not relate or struggle with men) as a viable one even if they'd like to. In a sense the men seemed to have incredible power in the situation since the women needed their help and were willing to give them equal control and struggle with them to get it. Most of the women involved were heterosexual and had no intention of cutting men out of their lives, but even the few women who did have that intention didn't think women could do it themselves -- could or would take care of each other including each other's children. At that time I saw that as straight male-identified thinking and lack of trust in other women. Now I think I understand better why women with children didn't trust those of us who had no children -- who had other political priorities, who at the most did a half day of daycare a week and had the option not to do any.

Still there were many disagreements I had with the women who worked in daycare. Mostly they were over separatism and over the fact that even the women who were separatists working in daycare did not support me and other women who were separatist or gay, and pandered to the men and women who used the center. They believed in community control and it seemed like any sacrifice in politics was acceptable to that end. I don't see any way to simply describe what I mean by community control. In this case the center was run by general meetings of parents and volunteers. I also can't spell out exactly how I think it should have been run. There is no opposite to community control, really. My complaint about it is that there are so many contradictions between volunteers and parents and that the way those contradictions generally get worked out is by majority rule rather than consensus (which I think is more right). Also even though I think people using a service and people working there should control it, I don't think that means they have the right to oppress anyone. Like an all white community doesn't have the right to be racist under the guise of community control--like parents don't have the right to be homosexist under the guise of community control of a daycare center.

It was during that first summer that the center was opened that the women in daycare and the women putting out the paper clashed. The daycare center wanted to put out some recruiting literature to hand out at registration here at the university. AIAW offered to give them the centerfold of the paper which could be removed from the paper and we offered to cover the cost. However, we wouldn't change any of our policies -- one of which was no males writing in the paper. The daycare women wanted to include reactions from male volunteers and thought our policy was wrong. From then on the disagreements between the paper and daycare only got worse.

In thinking back to that time I still feel my disagreements with the daycare cell were political and valid. At that time a feminist community was just beginning to grow and the women building it by attempting to live independently with other women, to not relate to men, should have been given respect and support. There never seemed a valid reason to reject our complaints about daycare while making concessions to male volunteers. And the arguments from the daycare cell about the need of the parents I could never see since the center was pretty freaky and university oriented. It all seemed pretty middle-class to me. Mostly the disagreements we had kept me from ever seeing the other (perhaps real) issue of daycare which was that those of us who did not have children of our own had a responsibility to share the work involved in taking care of children. We talked about a feminist controlled center at that time but never did anything about it. I stopped working at the center completely by middle winter and pretty much didn't relate to any women who worked in daycare except two women who lived in my living collective. One of those women later moved in with a woman, her husband and three kids. I never could completely understand how she could stand living in such a heterosexual scene but I do understand now how much help she gave in taking care of the children. I know I could never do anything like that and though I better understand now how much help a biological mother needs and how I have a responsibility to share the work involved, I still don't feel that it is fair to expect a gay woman to live in a heterosexual environment to fulfill that responsibility. But then I no longer think it's fair that any biological mother be left alone with the responsibility for her children either. At that time as I said I didn't relate to any biological mothers, children, or even women working in daycare. I think there are all kinds of walls and dividers blocking single (especially gay) women from relating to children. For a while this didn't bother me much at all and I still didn't feel I had a responsibility to do daycare in addition to my other political priorities. But eventually I started feeling that I wanted to relate to children but relating to them always seemed to mean being with men or heterosexual couples.

Somehow this changed somewhat. Maybe it was due to more women becoming gay and more women becoming part of or relating to the women's community here -- some of whom had children of their own and some of whom had been doing childcare for some time. Through these women and through my friend who was living with three children, I started being around children more and in situations where I felt I could be myself and be honest with them -- instead of being uptight about my politics or gayness slipping out in front of parents or men.

Just this summer a small group of parents and volunteers (mostly gay) split from one of the daycare centers in town over its sexism and homosexism. They began planning a feminist controlled daycare center. When I was called about it, I was surprised at how excited I was. And I must have changed some by that time in terms of my consciousness of the daycare issue because even though I still wanted to have a political group or project that was my priority and I was pretty sure that I didn't want that to be daycare, I was willing and thought it right that daycare time be demanded of me. The center was started in temporary housing to provide daycare for the children that had been left without it after the split and was still very much in the planning stages when I left town for two weeks. When I came back the concept of the center had changed. It was now a center to serve low income and working class women. That really disappointed me a lot. Why it disappointed me is a whole other article but real simplistically: 1) being working class myself I felt that since most of the women involved in starting it were middle class that it was presumptuous at best to think they could supply a service to low income and working class mothers that would not be exploitative and 2) I was afraid of the sacrifices that would be made regarding feminism -- there was talk at that time of gay women having to shuffle at the new center. However since the center was still to have only women working there, I intended to be active. I also saw the center as involving many women in the women's community and being a good way to struggle over the issue of daycare.

Also when I came back to town the women who had been most involved with the center were angry as all shit and ready to kick ass over the fact that many women did not do enough daycare and/or were irresponsible about the daycare thay did do or said they'd do. The real gut of the issue I think, where the anger came from, was the anger of women who were responsible for children (in most cases their own) toward those of us who had the option of doing daycare or not -- who had not been much of any help in the past and who at the most had a pretty superficial understanding of childcare.

The first general meeting that was called of all volunteers and women who wanted to work in the center was almost totally consumed with putting all of us who are not mothers and who hadn't done much daycare up against the wall. The meeting began with two women leaving to go get another woman who hadn't shown up and eventually physically fighting with her, and from there on the meeting only got worse with the issues of daycare, class, violence versus non-violence, getting thrown around in confusing and sometimes really incorrect ways.

It wasn't the first time I really disagreed with what was coming down over daycare and it wasn't the first time I felt really offended by some of what mothers were saying in regard to gayness and class. People were so angry over other people's laxness on daycare and so self-righteous about it that much was thrown out that I found offensive to gay women and particularly to working class women. It was really hard for me to listen to middle class women (who had children) tell me (working class) about the needs of working class mothers since I felt there was a lot of classist stereotyping expressed in their ideas. It was also hard to listen to middle class women talk to me about how privileged I was because I didn't have children.

The women who were planning the center issued financial statements to be filled out and used as a basis for taxing the volunteers and thus financially supporting the center. I found that pretty threatening since there was an atmosphere of classifying women without children as privileged in regard to childcare without being sensitive to their class backgrounds or other oppressions they may have suffered. In the same way, mothers were labeled oppressed seemingly without regard to their class positions. However it was the first time I knew I could not correctly choose to not deal with daycare because I disagreed with the politics of the women involved. Despite how incorrect in some ways I think the anger was directed and used, it was that anger and being put up against the wall that forced me to deal with an issue I had ignored for so long.

The daycare issue in this town has always been complex, but in the past when contradictions developed between people, the childless women would split. I think our political consciousness has grown higher now and does not allow us that option. Doing childcare is now respected political work that is expected of women active in the women's community. There is social pressure put on women who refuse to do childcare and this, I think, is as it should be. The complexities of the issue have increased by the number of women who have to deal with it and the contradictions between gay women and straight women, mothers and non-mothers, women of different classes.

I don't see any easy direction -- I know I'm not sure of what is the absolute way of dealing with it. Right now there are hassles between the needs of mothers and the needs of gay women who work in the center. The only way I know to deal with that is to deal with it -- not ignore it and for all of us to be sensitive to everyone's needs and oppressions. As regards childcare I think mothers must be listened to because it is they who best understand the issue and work involved. I realize that what I say could sound like wishy washy liberalism -- everybody should be listened to, etc. But I think we have long passed the stage of seeing things in simplistic contradictions and as regards contradictions between women (gay/straight, working class/middle class, etc) I don't see that any contradiction is primary or any oppression is primary. I am only sure that no oppression should be ignored.

"...a million memories that make me sick..."

When I was eleven I started baby sitting. I enjoyed it and children liked me; often they would come and ask me to "baby sit them" without their parents' knowledge. I was tall, skinny, and not very articulate (my mother was beautiful and intelligent and never could understand how she'd gotten this dumb and ugly daughter) but children didn't seem to mind, and I didn't care that they were little and not very articulate.

By 18 I had filled out enough to fit the emaciated vogue and my mother, being a realist, often told me I'd better get married before I lost my figure and couldn't find a husband. I was just 19 when I followed that advice to her relief.

In the next eight years my husband somehow taught me that my whole worth was in my body which began to betray me with age and pregnancies. I remember wanting my first child, but I also remember crying and freaking out, wanting to leave my husband, wanting to stay pregnant and not have the baby, wanting not to be pregnant, angry screaming sessions when I would threaten to leave knowing that I had nowhere to go, no way to get there, and no money that was not his. Money was what kept me with him, and guilt, and a feeling that I was a rotten person and all these feelings were evil, and anyway I was certainly not capable of taking care of myself. I used to wish he would die and fantasize about how I should react when they came and told me.

For years I stayed up until two and three a.m. then crept quietly into bed trying not to squeak the springs so he wouldn't wake up, and when he did lying quietly, responding as little as possible, trying to keep my mind on other things, feeling inadequate and not wanting him to know. At first it did hurt to fuck; after the children it was mostly just degrading and a time consuming bore which kept me from getting enough sleep. I was always tired.

Our second child was an unfortunate mistake. By this time I knew enough to be terrified of giving birth, and of having the responsibility of children; and my husband was in Viet Nam doing his macho adventurer, and at that time glorified, thing; so I was alone with this one.

Smiling male lab technicians gave me the good news that I was indeed five months pregnant and were shocked when I started crying and couldn't stop (after all I was married!). I felt like a selfish sub-human. I cried every night for months and it was my first child who often climbed into bed with me patting my back saying "don't cry mommy." I felt guilty for that too. That child was my only reason for surviving. We, together, dealt with what was happening without words, without explanations -- with hugs and smiles and raging screaming tantrums. I began to deny the pregnancy and in that way with the support of a two year old I coped. But when the undeniable happened and the new baby came I didn't love her, I didn't even like her, I didn't want her. And now a new problem set in. You can't go anywhere with a toddler, an infant, two diaper bags and a purse. About once a week my mother babysat (more often if I begged) and I had enough money for a baby sitter once in a while, other than that I took out the garbage and talked to the mailman. Three months later my husband arrived home, in a wheel chair, having been seriously injured in Viet Nam. So now I had to push him around and wait on him as well as always be cheerful so as not to make him feel depressed. The only thing he could do was fuck. The first month he was out of the hospital I had to bundle up the children and drive him to the hospital for shots every six hours.

I began to go through depressions that lasted for months, only getting drunk helped, which I did as often as possible. I thought constantly of death, the look he'd have when he found me, what others would feel -- bad, I hoped. I began to resent, hate the children. My daughter was into smearing the walls of her room with shit once or twice a day, she screamed, fussed, cried, or was into something all the time and was generally unpleasant to be around. My best escape was sleep, but with the children I couldn't sleep in the daytime, and at night there was my husband to contend with. I didn't even think about leaving at first; all that talk about broken homes and juvenile delinquents and how could I support two children and what I owed everybody else, especially the children and my duty and responsibility, somehow I was stuck forever and it was their fault. I had no friends; married women seldom do, their husbands carefully see to that. I had only him to talk to and over the years I had learned that he was always right in the end until I could barely formulate an opinion much less make a decision; to say what I thought was to have it changed into something else until I only thought his thoughts (that still happens, after all those years it's hard to change). It took me three months to decide to leave, then it was six more months before I left, six months of me begging for money and him being cool and logical and reasonable, telling me how I couldn't manage and me explaining that it wasn't him but me, that I was all messed up and needed a little time away to get it together, then I'd surely be back if he'd only be patient. He let me go out of fear I think, fear that I would kill myself or go insane. I had the nerve to leave because of that same fear.

The next two years were almost as bad as before with me hoping for an empty mail box rather than the guilt of letters from him and well meaning friends and family always telling me why I should return ("think of the children"), him being sick from his Viet Nam injuries, he was going to die he kept saying, he was only asking for two years of my life, it was the least I could do. And there were the other men each worse than the last. In the end I felt like a headless body ("shut up and get in bed"). I was lucky, I was only forcibly raped once.

It goes on and on, a million memories that make me feel sick, screaming at the children until my head ached then panicked with guilt; fucking with man after man that I disliked, it was enough if they would talk to me and would put up with the children; trying to teach the kids to be polite and quiet and not scare people away.

But I don't like people touching me now. And I have little patience with children. I'm terrified of the gay women's community because there seems to be no place to go if I can't be there. But women start telling each other what mothers would want as though I don't exist, or talking and telling me I'm wrong about everything I think or feel and it doesn't matter if I'm right or wrong and I'm probably wrong, but I'm starting to understand where I've been and what it's done to me. I don't think you realize that you can't erase those years simply by doing child care now. That being a mother like every other form of oppression, goes deeper than the physical reality.

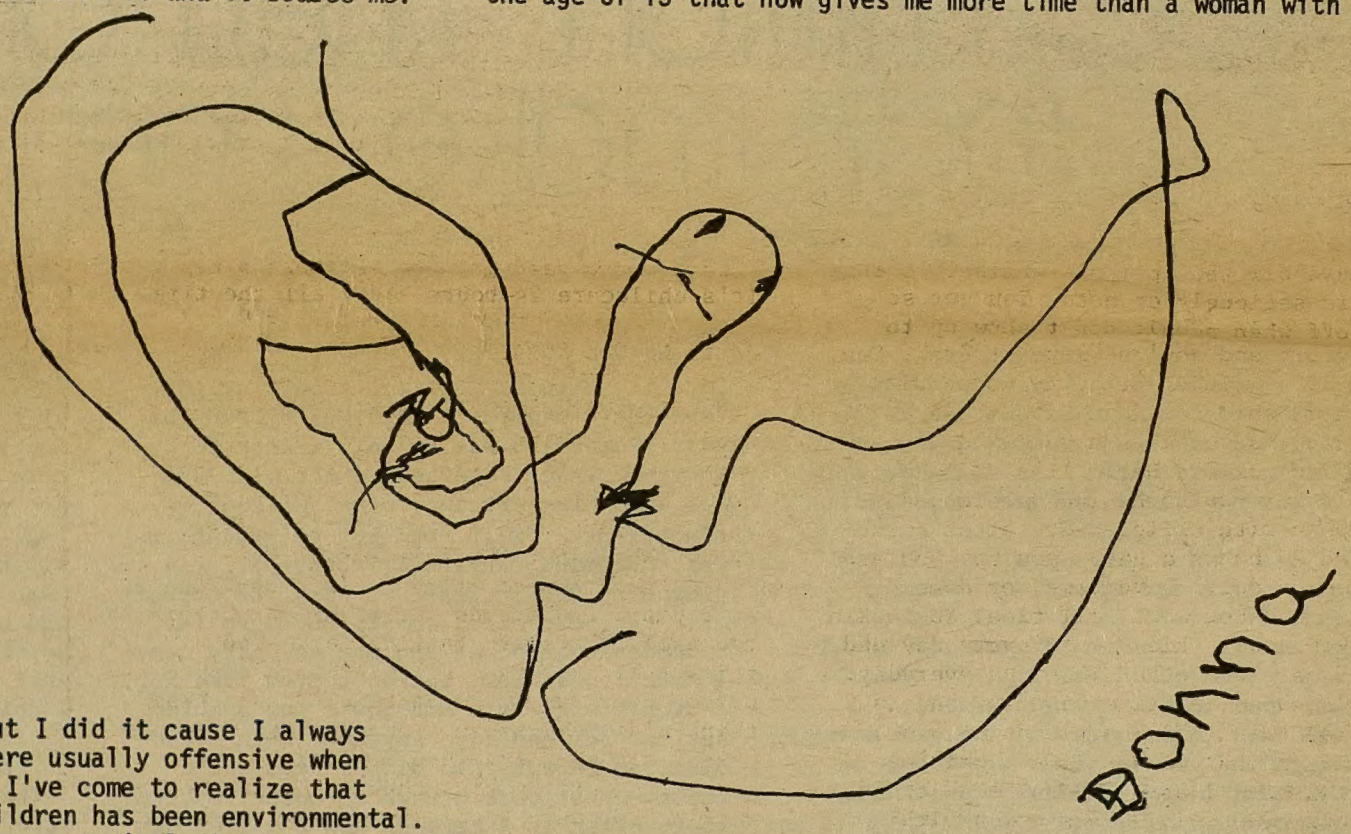
DIALOG BETWEEN OLD GAYS

I never wanted a child, or wanted anything to do with children. After doing babysitting in my early teens I had nothing more to do with children until this last year. I've gone through really radical changes in my attitude about children: from being threatened about how little control I have with their candidness to being less authoritarian and giving them more control over activities, trying to be non-age chauvinistic, from feeling they are helpless, puzzling and fragile to encouraging them to be independent, self-sufficient and tough, listening to their ideas and respecting children.

I shared the attitude held by many lesbians who have been gay for years--why should I do any childcare? Children come from heterosexual relationships that not only oppress me, but socially ostracize me when the opportunity comes up. Children can not be entrusted to homosexuals because we are perverted, say the straight parents, to the point of keeping us from teaching and any occupation dealing with children, so why, now, should I do childcare for women with children, whether they are poor, don't have husbands, or even if they are gay? I'm gay and with that I accept not having children, I do not want children, and I do not want to have anything to do with children.

Where I'm coming from about kids is liking them O.K. but just not having much contact with them. My only brother was one year younger and my only younger cousins lived in Minneapolis and came down once a year. I didn't like to babysit because the thought of the parents coming home drunk made me cringe.

When I was a teenager everyone reinforced my behavior with kids and told me I was good with them. But because my interactions were so far between, I never have had much confidence in my ability to come through in a pinch and calm a crying child. I'm only just most recently realizing that I can meet children's needs, like Saturday night when I did over night care at Sparky, I got them all to bed without crying just by kissing them. But still I have real problems with getting angry when a child is crying for no reason that I can see. Sometimes I can't control it and it scares me.



I didn't like babysitting either, but I did it cause I always needed money. And, yes, the parents were usually offensive when they came home drunk! Because of that I've come to realize that part of my not wanting to be around children has been environmental. Straight households are oppressive to everyone including the child and the babysitter. Children in this situation have caused me a lot of grief. They have called me names in front of their parents, they've asked me if I am a man, and they've even told their parents that I had a girlfriend over. Statements like that aren't so uncomfortable for me in the environment I'm in now, but because of the children's honest and eager observations in the straight home I usually had to make some witty and self-put-downish comment to appease both child and onlooking parent. These circumstances were great reinforcers of the self-hatred most gay people live with in this stiflingly straight society. The flaw in my resentment is that it was directed toward the children involved rather than against the oppressive straight, nuclear family.

Castigation of gayness is induced by straight society onto not only gay people but children who will carry-on that attitude. It is self-contemptuous of me to promote anti-homosexuality when doing childcare, and I will not do it. When I babysat in the straight environment that is what I had to do, and that is one reason why I no longer wanted to do childcare in any capacity. In such an environment a gay person has no stake in the care and development of any child--not even her own--and is forced to contribute to her future oppression. This society brainwashes children to hate and adopt biases against people for no direct reason other than that's what the parents were taught. I refuse to promote sexist, homosexist, racist and fascist attutudes in children I do childcare with because it is ultimately self-destructive to me and the society I want to live in.

I agree with you. There are many real and material reasons why gay women don't seek out children to relate to. Over the years gay people have been burned, castrated, hung, jailed and beaten for even looking crossways at children. And if those consequences seemed far removed to me, very few times have I related to a child since I've been gay without looking over my shoulder to see who's watching and what they're thinking. Society has planted the seed and I carry it and torture myself.

One of society's most basic and powerful psychological weapons against gay women is that living with a woman means you're cutting yourself off from having children. Most gay women have to deal with that within themselves very early. If it is overcome, it's done in varied ways, but certainly one defense is to reject children and motherhood as anything valuable.

I have also felt paranoid constantly with children because of some of the things you pointed out. But another problem for me has been even accepting my responsibility to children because I am not ultimately responsible for them and because of my painful interactions with them in the past. Also, because of my isolation in a rural, extended-family type community I was not early aware of the many women who have to raise their children alone, I was not aware of the difference class makes in childcare responsibility even if a husband is present, and I didn't take into account that all women are socialized to be child-bearers and that I was casting-off that role earlier than many women would. I now accept responsibility for children because they are people who need to be cared for because of their age and because in primary parent/child relationships the daily child-rearing falls on the mother's shoulders. Women with children need to be freed from that.

My transition to taking responsibility for other women's children hasn't been smooth. The glaring facts remain unresolved and undealt with that: 1. I have qualms about doing childcare for women who relate to men exclusively because those relationships create more space for heterosexuality and do nothing to lessen my oppression as a gay women. 2. I question the criticism from middleclass gay women with children whose approach it is that I am privileged not to have children and responsibility for them because where they are coming from is a doubly privileged position from mine: their money could buy childcare services and their heterosexual relationship was socially sanctioned. 3. I resent being told by new gay women with children that my conscious decision at the age of 13 that now gives me more time than a woman with children, is a privilege because the ensuing, daily oppression by straights from my decision was certainly a long unrewarded and painful struggle--while heterosexual standards rewarded marriage and children.

I understand the unsmootheness of the transition. I have similar qualms, but I think the problems between gay women and mothers are caused by oversimplification on both sides.

Your number one in the last paragraph doesn't fall into that category, however. I have the same gut level feeling when I think about doing day care for heterosexual women. But we are assuming that struggle within them isn't going on. Last night at the Sparky general meeting which 3 heterosexual mothers came to, I saw them struggling with and realizing why we as gay women did not want single men parents in Sparky--and how it was oppressive to us. The other thing I always want to be careful of is to not rule on other women's sexuality or make my responsibility to them contingent on their being gay.

I know it's hard to listen to the anger of a mother when she's middle class and more privileged than you in some ways. If it were a working class mother you could hear the anger and oppression much more clearly, but it's there in a middle class mother also. (Lots of times I catch myself playing "More oppressed than thou" and have to stop and make myself listen to what the woman is angry about.) The oppression of motherhood hits both classes.

Not so long ago you both as gay women were all real self-righteous in putting other women up against the wall about dealing with our homosexism. You sometimes made mistakes and were blind to the other oppressions that some straight women suffered. Still in the long run your confronting straight women was a good thing. It helped alot of gay women, gave them space and pride and it also developed the consciousness of the whole movement. Perhaps the anger of mothers will do the same. I just think we should give them the respect we want given to gay women.

I cringe when I am told I am privileged not to have children. It's not a privilege--it's the logical outcome of my way of life which is fought against and sneered at in this society. If mothers talk privilege like that to gay women I'll bet they'll get alot of women who feel they have been deprived of relating to children against their will. And there it is, not a matter of privilege, but two different types of people who are oppressed in different ways. It's too simple to say we are privileged because in very basic ways we are not.

So why does there seem to be this "more oppressed than thou" bargaining with oppressions. Last night at the Sparky general meeting a working class gay woman got mad at a middleclass gay mother about class and the mother got mad at the other about childcare. They ended their exchange with one saying "I'm sick of having you not listen to me about class." To which the mother replied "I'm sick of having you not listen to me about the oppression of children and mothers." The mention of one oppression should not be used as a defense against having to deal with another's oppression.

But this goes on alot. It's because of the peculiar context in which oppression is seen within a community whose members all have been maimed by society in one way or other. In order to overcome the psychological affects of oppression you must become angry and realize that instead of there being something wrong with you, there is something wrong with society and those oppressing you. Once you do that you can respect yourself. Others also, if they are urged to consciousness about gayness, class or motherhood, come to respect what you have done and what you say politically. And that is how oppression becomes a source of community respect instead of a scourge.

Because this is a political community and politics has to do with oppression, oppression and good politics are basic sources of respect. They, therefore, take on additional social and emotional meaning and that's where things get messed up. Oppression almost becomes a commodity that people bargain for because their egos are tied up in there somewhere.

"More oppressed than thou" is an off shoot of this. It says "I'm more oppressed than you are so I don't have to deal with your problem." We must begin examining our motives when we are defensive in such a way about someone else's oppression.

I definitely agree that all of us in the Iowa City Women's Community have to deal with other's oppression by watching how we have been oppressed affect how we relate to other women and visa versa. I don't think that mutual respect for each other's oppressions is enough without some attempt by all to help equalize our situations. I've never seen middleclass women do much about how they oppress working class women by their privileged background that gives them many, many advantages working class women never had and never can have. Class differences change the degree to which a mother or a gay women are oppressed and I want middle class women in this community to start dealing with that fact and listening to working class women's suggestions on how they can change at the same time as we're listening to them about gayness or motherhood.

Getting back to childcare more specifically, though, the circumstances seem to be that women who have had children and are raising them are defensive about women who haven't had children beginning to share responsibility for children even to the point of doing it without the mother. It's true that it isn't that easy to erase the oppression of motherhood, but women without children are trying to help.

I can relate to mothers' defensiveness about women without children suddenly taking responsibility for children because of the similarity between that and the old gay/new gay situation. After having been gay for 14 yrs myself there are now many, many women who are gay and share some experiences, but who will never feel the oppressive atmosphere of isolation, condesension, fear of exposure, and loneliness that I lived with until the gay women's community blossomed in Iowa City within the last two years, and there are times when I resent newer gay women talking about the oppression of gayness because they've never gone through and never will need to experience what long-time gay women have had to go through. In the same way women just recently sharing childcare responsibilities will never be as oppressed by isolation, decision-making, lack of time for themselves, etc, that mothers have experienced. And all these reasons validate some lack of trust.

The whole point of sharing childcare responsibilities for me is to equalize the burden that keeps some women busy 24 hrs a day. But at the same time an exchange of consideration, and attempts at respect from learning other women's need, must be happening or the "more oppressed than thou" syndrome will never end.

The following was an open letter from a mother written to women in the community who had not been doing childcare and read at the first Sparky organizational meeting.

You have all the options--whether to take childcare seriously or not. You get so pissed off when people don't show up to work daycare and you're "stuck there". Yes, you should be pissed but many women with children in this town are "stuck there" 24 hours a day, seven days a week and no one shows up to relieve her. It's so fucking difficult for you to be inconvenienced. Well, women with children are often inconvenienced 24 hours a day. you say you are so busy--you don't have time, or damned little time. You work full time, so fuckin' what? Women with kids do it every day and do child care the other 16 hours everyday. You can't even find time to do it once a week. You think childcare ends at 5:30.

You say you have other time committments. You have that option. Perhaps AIAW could be put out by working class women with children if they weren't stuck home with their kids. But you say you're too busy! What shit.

Your amount of committment to childcare seems to vary according to your social life. If you're into a relationship, it often causes you to fuck off childcare responsibilities. You have that option. Women with children don't. You say you're freaking out--having personal hassles. You have the option to spend two weeks freaking out, unable to do anything else (namely childcare). Women with children have to freak out about the responsibilities of childcare.

You never think of having relationships with children. You might get off on them occasionally when you have to do childcare but you never ask them to do something that could be fun for both of you--you always ask another adult.

When you're with someone constantly, it usually puts a strain on your relationship. Low income women with children have no options about being with their kids constantly.

You stay up all night having a good time with adults and when you come to daycare, you fall asleep or are just too burned out to relate to the kids. You're ripping off the kids. It's also an option that women with kids don't have. Women with kids can't say "I'll stay up late and have a good time cause I can do my 4 hours childcare tomorrow and go home and take a nap". It's childcare 24 hours a day all the time.

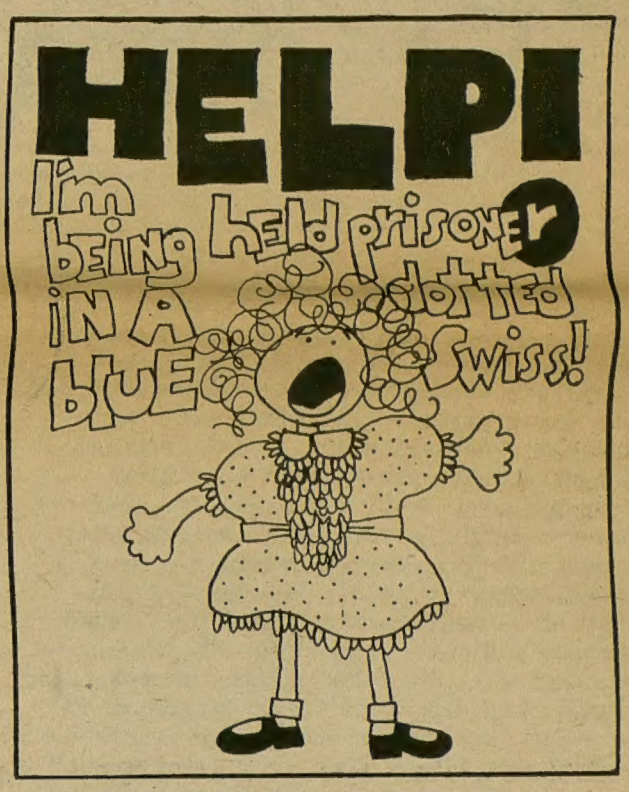
About My Own Kids

You expect me to bring them (or be responsible for finding a ride) to and from daycare. Why can't you? You ask me if I'm going to bring them to the dance/party or whatever, cause you'd really like to see them. Why can't you take them?

Kids have to eat three meals a day. One's at daycare...where do you think the other two come from every fucking day? You think they look real nice in butch drag. Do you ever buy or get them clothes? You think kids need shoes. Who paid $7.00 a pair for them? And when I think that I get more help with my kids than any other woman with kids that I know, it makes me sick to hear your excuses. I say you'd better think a long time about the lip service you give to childcare cause what's getting done in this town by women without kids for women with kids is piddly. It's only at your convenience that you relate to kids and that ain't enough.

Additions while talking with two other mothers

1. You don't have to keep your house straightened, there are no kids around to trip over junk or eat things off the floor. And, if you want to clean house, it will stay clean for more than five minutes because there's no kids to mess it up.
2. Some landlords won't rent to people with kids--esp. single women with kids.
3. You can choose what political activities you want to be involved in. Women with kids have to choose daycare or there won't be daycare. You can put childcare on a charity basis.
4. You have the option to do childcare only when
   a. you're in the mood
   b. you like the particular children
   c. all the supplies are provided by the parent
   d. the kids are the age you get off on
   e. there's only one kid
   f. you like the mother
   g. the mothers give you ego-building thanks
5. You can be ignorant of legalities concerning kids (custody etc.) and rely on the mother "to fill you in".
6. You can go anywhere on a moments notice.
7. You can make definite plans and then not have to figure out child care arrangements.
8. You can go to social events and only think about refreshments for yourself. You can have parties and only think about accommodating adults.
9. You can plan your money around one person.
10. You can carry around an appointment book and be sure of meeting all of them.
11. You have the option to think all this stuff is picky.
12. You only have to worry about winter clothes and other necessities (like food) for yourself.
13. You don't have to spend money/ space on cribs, toys etc.
14. You can have a house full of neat shit that kids would wreak.
15. You can rely on mothers to get kids to and from you if it is just as much of a hassle for both of you.
16. You can avoid or reduce amount of energy spent dealing with schools, doctors, welfare, and grandparents.
17. Basically you have two options that women with children don't have:
    1. to not relate to children
    2. to relate to children only under certain conditions.



Think about what it would be like to live my life

This may take the form of an open letter to all non-biological mothers, those of you who refer to yourself as such and to those of you who are not doing much childcare, for some reason or another. I would like to start out by saying that we need help! Having a child is a never-ending responsibility. It is too often a very fine thing, but it is often a burden too. Mothers are accused of not trusting you enough and of trying to exercise too much control of our children. I want to trust you implicitly but it has been my experience that surrogate parents will always split for one reason or another. I can only trust you so far when I realize that your commitment is only good as long as you are living with me or as long as you live within geographic proximity. For this reason,I am learning to take all the help I can while I can get it, but taking long-term commitments lightly.

I don't want complete control of my child but I know that I will be the only person who will be consistently responsible for his life for the next 15 years, so I have to retain at least 30% control. Often times it is 90%. It is unfortunate that adults do have to exercise control over children, but it is unnecessary to go into reasons for this. Even when I've lived with two other people who are sharing responsibility, I find that I'm the only one who cares if he spends too much time at day care. Children burn out on one place and one group of people also. I'm the only one who washes his hair or cleans up his room. As a mother I am forced into the position of coordinator of his care. I'm the one who has to see that some adult is with him at all times. Often times my only resources for childcare are other biological mothers who shouldn't be asked to take on additional responsiblity. These are the people however, who understand and share my problems. We are forced to help each other for lack of non-parents taking responsiblity.

Please do childcare for us and don't ask us to shuffle for it, to always have to ask and to be sure to say please and thank you. Call me and ask if you can take him that night or just go pick him up from day care and leave me a note on the blackboard. Show me I can depend on you. I will burn out. Without your help I will soon be looking for a divorce from my child. Also please don't choose female children over males. We couldn't determine the sex of our children. Mothers of male children need even more help. It is impossible for me to reinforce non-sexist behavior alone. This may sound very preachy and sometimes bitter. That wasn't my intention but it might serve to demonstrate my situation, and those of most other mothers that I have talked to. I should add that there are a whole lot of women in this community who are doing a fantastic job as non-biological mothers but there are too many of you who do little child care because you have other commitments. Well I have other commitments too and there is a lot more I want to do that I don't have the time for. Think about what it would be like to live my life.

"Et cum spiritu tuo."*

* "And with your spirit." (Latin response from Roman Catholic Mass.)

I am a gay working-class non-biological mother. I grew up as the oldest in a Catholic family of eleven, and have done childcare duties at home and for other people for eleven years as a babysitter, substitute parent (both mine work full-time), and daycare worker. I do regular childcare, with the help of my living collective, outside of daycare for four children from the women's community, plus irregularly for several others. I have a committment to three "regulars" I consider to be ongoing until it's not needed anymore, and want to maintain close relationships with them for as long as possible. I guess that hinges on their agreement to that when they're all old enough to make a choice, as I have done. My involvement with all three of them came about through daycare, before I knew their mothers, or had specific friendships with them. This situation has sort of free meaning to me that I value. I do not want my relations with these kids to be controlled by their parents or the people they live with. About ten children were walked out of my life over a political split between adults in a center here this year, and the thought of it happening again is frightening. I love them a lot and have as much right and responsibility as a parent - and I am determined not to fuck that off. I do think that some agreements must exist between biological/legal parents and us others, but I think it's wrong for relationships between adults to dictate or control relationships between adults and kids. It's unfair and fucked-up for all.

Childcare has been a primary commitment for me since before the beginnings of my feminist politics and involvement in the Iowa City women's community. I came to this town in 1969 to go to college on the typically inadequate crumbs that the University and government dole out to lower-class kids trying to "better themselves" and class climb. It's a burn and an insult -- but that's another story, right? Bullshit...

Anyway, after my dazzling freshman year and another stint at home, DOING 24 HOUR CHILDCARE FOR A WORKING CLASS WOMAN, I moved to Iowa City permanently and deliberately started working in a daycare center because I needed to find a place to live and support myself. My growing feminist consciousness, spurred by the various males, liberals, and/or straight middle class students around me, directed me to Women's Liberation. There were daycare centers, a living collective, a gay cell, music cell, and Ain't I A Woman? - all of which interested me. I chose daycare because it was open to me, and I liked kids because I did think everyone should relate to them for humanitarian reasons about their value as the "future of the Revolution." I also knew there was to be a new women's collective that I wanted to live in.

When I was home babysitting and working my ass off all the time in my younger days, however, kids were clearly an economic burden and too often an emotional one, too. My mom cracked up and almost died twice in 19 years. I always dug the idea of schools or communities where kids could live and work and run their own lives. (Actually, in those days I didn't want to go to school, and used to imagine that work was easier and better than school.) I also wanted such a thing because I really knew where I was at in the social strata, and I wanted upper-class kids to fork over the loot and live like the rest of us. All those times in school when I was called brassy and belligerant, all that shit I took about how if I'd behave and lose weight and tow the line, then those things would come my way... Fuck it! I made my decision not to get married or have kids for class reasons more than anything else, and I consider that to be a political example of what makes the working-class foxier than the middle-class. I resent any woman of economic privilege telling me how oppressed she is as a mother if she is unwilling to reconize my experience and committment as equally valid and substantial. I have very certain ideas about the nuclear families, monogamies, and parental authority, stemming from my childhood and adult experiences with daycare, and those must be struggled with too.

The new collective finally formed above the daycare center I worked in. The co-ops were getting it together to get University faculty houses, by one means or another, and ours (University Parents' Care Collective) was first. The center was all white, and almost totally middle-class and University connected, as students and faculty.

Our collective was supposed to clean the house every week and work the first and last hour shifts of everyday, (five days a week) in return for the use of it's second floor and "kitchen privileges." My commitment to the center and it's members was dependent on that and my politics, those being that daycare was for freeing women and children and smashing monogamies and families (as all those parents will heartily and piggishly attest to.) All this time my other politics, including class, were in constant turmoil.

The group I identify with has few members, and this was especially true here when less than eight feminists worked in daycare. My involvement with childcare was a sore spot and a political division in the AIAW collective and the whole women's community for a long time. I've felt the frustration of mothers and know the meaning of their anger against women without kids. I've had to deal with it between myself and those women, and between myself and oppressed mothers. I've been reactionary in situations about kids sort of like parents are, like not trusting the capabilities of non-mothers, just taking over duties and hassles rather than explaining things, and not dealing with their fears or uptightness because they weren't real to me, and I considered them all excuses and bigotry. I do know what it is to be burned on a commitment to childcare, and I've heard a lot of pigshit from those who wouldn't deal with their agism, privilege and laziness, but there has to be determined struggle by all of us, and that includes over the oppression that non-mothers, especially gay and lower-class ones, suffer at the hands of this rich, male society of nuclear families.

Working in the cooperatives here is oppressive to women, gays, and working-class people. We've taken endless shit from packs of middle-class professors, students , and hippies. Just such a group, supported by their tied, true or groupie women, excluded gay feminists from the first center established here by Women's Liberation, (Dum Dum Daycare Center). It's hard enough to struggle over political issues, let alone try to challenge parental superiority and ownership when mothers are paranoid, untrusting and liberal to the point of being pawns in men's hands. We've been threatened with financial

insecurity, no daycare, and the police -- all of which the reactionaries came through on. We had to attend meetings with men who were exploitative and condescending We had to listen to the endless hassles of married women who oppressed us as lesbians and resisted feminist politics like the plague. If we could even be gay "publically" it meant practically nothing beyond wearing a button in a foreign language. Co-opted, lost and liberalized. There were major freak outs over teaching female children to defend themselves and not be weak, and trying to make boys be less macho, straight and domineering. The parents thought we were horrible and fascistic, and their liberal jive didn't fool anyone on our side.

This summer the parents in the co-op I lived in expelled 20 of us-two mothers, plus gay and straight volunteers of both sexes. Specifically the splits were over feminism, separatism, and the gay socializing of children. The women of our group wanted two days a week of only women in the center, and commitment by all the women to struggling towards a radical feminist analysis dealing with class, race , and gayness. We confronted them, hassled, were left alone in the center, threatened with the police and totally ejected when the token marxist family went on vacation and the remaining liberals could get away with really exercising their power as they saw fit. TOTAL PIG.

So, the "radicals" were shoved out and our troubles were only beginning. The faction had to form a new center (Sparky Daycare Center), and the group was already fucked-up. We had defended irresponsible volunteers with transitory commitments to show solidarity, and had to hassle with men - most of whom were bad news, and I knew it from my past dealings with them, and the way they reacted to separatist struggle among the women. They were a cause of splits among us.

The women finally split from the men and formed B.O.S.S.(Bitches Out to Stomp Sexism) and recommitted themselves, naming the Lesbian Daycare Manifesto from RAT as the basis of their daycare politics. As it happened too many times in the past, a number of "committed radicals" went their merry way, committed to their social lives and despicable degeneracy. Distrust flourished. During these times I was criticized by a member of AIAW for not acting collectively by making decisions and judgements on my own, or with a few members of B.O.S.S. At the time I was used to acting on my own because I'd never been in any affinity group in daycare outside of occasional solidarity in our living collective, and most of B.O.S.S. and Sparky was irresponsible, untrustworthy, and had bad politics, if any. But she was right, and I tried to struggle over it in light of the fact that primary collectives were to be discussed, etc... The B.O.S.S. politics were rhetoric, though, and I knew in my gut that I could not contribute much support to the group. I left with a letter to B.O.S.S. of political criticisms and disagreement - and a commitment to Sparky's mothers and children and feminist daycare.

Most of the working-class women left B.O.S.S. and the remainder, dominated by middle-class guilt and service politics outside B.O.S.S. decided to form a free childcare center for service to working-class and lower-class women. This was a total political turnabout, and I had gut feelings of revulsion to the idea of those women "serving" women of my class - or even thinking they could. It was Classism Supreme, and I only recently realized exactly how bad that was. Co-opted, liberalized. I knew the implications of their classist guilt, irresponsibility, and rotten political methods - and I was depressed about the fate I expected for working-class women and children in their hands. But the children I was involved with were dependent on Sparky and it was the women's community center, or so parts of the community thought. If I had fully realized the havoc "service" daycare was going to wreak on the women staffing it - especially the gay, working-class volunteers who have been systematically insulted, ignored, de-classed, and generally shat on, I would have hid the insurance policy, grabbed the kids and split for Des Moines. The Lesbian Daycare Manifesto had been discarded like a menu.

The sore points of anger over women in the community not relating to childcare came to a head at a general meeting slated for confrontation and lots of justified, long-simmering resentment. But bad methods and confused politics dominated that anger, and it all started up after I and a middle-class women from B.O.S.S. had a fight with another middle-class woman who had been irresponsible about childcare and refused to come to the meeting. I completely lost my temper and most of my rage against her at the time was based on the fact that she was privileged, and had been making $300 a month as a work-study student for sauntering into the center a few hours a week. If I recall she was told to return all the money to Sparky and has not to this date. Count on middle-class women to allow something like that. I regret that fight, but I think it did have a heavy impact on the previously uncommitted women at the meeting, and on the whole community.

Women who previously couldn't be moved by anything short of fear of death, were organizing and committing themselves. The first non-biological mothers group (Non BMs) formed out of women at the meeting who had not done anything for mothers or children, and needed a group to organize themselves. Non BMs got their shit together fast, and has been responsible.

But the formation of this group sort of left me out in the cold. It wasn't for me because I had always done childcare and didn't need the consciousness-raising that non BMs did. And it was closed to me, particularly, because everyone was pissed about that fight. The other woman was also excluded when she tried to join, because she was a member of B.O.S.S. and also , I think, because she was on the outs, too. For a while I felt that she should have been able to join because she hadn't really been any more together than Non BMs had, and that she needed the organization and discipline. However, this was an incorrect idea, because it ignored the fact that she was responsible for her behavior and lack of direction primarily, and it was up to her to take first steps to change. And she hasn't so far. The point I thought I was trying to make is that personal rifts and relationships seem to have an unfair influence on the membership and political direction of groups.

Anyway, all these months relating to Sparky almost totally on my own has been a drag. Just like it's a drag to live alone or virtually alone and try to do childcare outside of daycare all by myself. I now live in a gay, working-class collective of three women and four occasional (definite) kids. Changing my living situation has seemed like an answer to some of my hassles this year.

Very recently the volunteers of Sparky started to organize in protest against Sparky being a service daycare center. We all feel a need for the center as a place for the children we have, and a place where we can freely live as gay women, committed to radical changes, political education, fighting classism, and controlling our interest and labor and needs. B.O.S.S. had disintegrated into the Planning Committee, set up as an administrative group to do that kind of work. But most of us were too unorganized and untogether to keep the committee and a few other women from controlling Sparky's money, lease, policies, and membership. I want Sparky to serve those people who are involved in it-- that means the community women and the working-class mothers and children who are members. The mothers started organizing because some mothers, including two Sparky mothers and one non-member working-class mother thought the interests of working-class women were being trampled by the gay non-mothers (half of whom are working-class) who opposed the notion of service. We did not want to ask community children to leave because they were "privileged" according to those mothers, because they were either middle-class or lived within a middle-class political community. This was outrageous - that us working-class women were privileged because of our radical politics and high consciousness. De-classed, co-opted, insulted. We wanted our children in a center that we worked to maintain, and that would fulfill our physical, political needs. The results of the mothers' meetings called for such things as male parent membership, supported by the sexist and homosexist declarations of the mother-organizers; that women with high feminist consciousness could and should deal with males and heterosexuals in the other co-ops to free up space in the service center. When the last general meeting of all Sparky workers and mothers was held it was clear that the mothers whose rights were supposedly so threatened by feminism and gayness, had not even heard a word of what we were concerned with - and showed definite interest in struggling over the issues. So much for the "low consciousness-potential" that lower class people are thought to have. And fuck middle-class attitudes that say that politics have to be soft-pedalled to the masses so they'll fight in the Revolution. What bigotry. Patronized, manipulated, and co-opted. The working-class mothers of Sparky are proof of our revolutionary potential.

Before the last general meeting, all the gay working-class volunteers met and came up with a statement of criticism and politics that included our refusal to work with men, and our committment to struggling over how we oppress mothers. We also called for struggle from mothers, straight women, and middle-class women over what we say is our oppression, and the radical analysis we support and want to practice. We read it at the meeting and the discussion was hopeful, I think, even though there are serious splits between some of the mothers and a couple of volunteers and the rest of us. Some of the things that concern me about Sparky are the fact that the almighty University-connected women in the center, and that one dissenting collective contributes a large amount of Sparky's income so they can threaten our existence anytime. They have , in fact, already done so. Last month when they proposed complete service daycare, and that community children must leave, they withheld the money in lieu of our protest, and the working-class cook's salary went unpaid, not to mention the rent, utilities, and food bill. They finally paid the money, and a proposal was made at the last meeting that, since we have to depend on their money, that they give the center a month's notice to recover it in case of further trouble.

So now the Planning Committee is experimentally dissolved, and we are taking a month to discuss and explore a new structure for Sparky. The mothers are going to continue to meet, as will the first non-BMs group. The rest of the volunteers have several options; to continue individually , reform the Planning Committee, or form similar non-BMs groups. My living collective has joined a non-BMs group with seven other women, five working-class, and all gay. Two members of our group are 18 or under, and one is over thirty. One has been married, one had a baby that she didn't keep, and one had an illegal abortion. Most of us work, and two of us are students. We intend to continue our group regardless of the specifics of Sparky's new structure. And our committment to mothers, children, and our politics is firm.

doris and the sparkettes*

Ten of us are now members of a collective called "Non Biological Mothers Group One." It is basically a support group of women new to childcare who have come to see childcare as a political priority. The process that brought us to the place where we knew we needed the kind of collective we have was a long, often confusing and scarey one. We feel it's important to analyze the conditions that brought us here, and explain the reasons our collective is necessary to us.

When the Iowa City WLF broke into cells in the spring of 1970, one of those cells was Daycare. It was responsible for establishing Dum-Dum Daycare Center, the first cooperative, free daycare center in Iowa City. Since its formation about a half-dozen similar centers have formed, and many women in the Women's Movement have volunteered at some time or other at the two centers which were politically closest to us. For political reasons explained elsewhere in this issue, a group of gay women split from an existing center and formed Sparky Daycare in the spring of 1972.

None of the ten of us participated centrally in any of this history. We were all involved in political projects such as women's medicine, providing transportation services to local poor people, AIAW, gay consciousness raising, etc. etc. There have been over a dozen groups in those two years, some for the whole period, most shorter-lived. Daycare was looked upon by most non-mothers in the Women's Movement as another group with political importance, but no political priority.

The error in this analysis gradually became clearer to many women in the women's community. We realized that childcare counts so much it should go without saying; that childcare is essential to the political life of a community which is not going to exclude biological mothers, and which envisions a society that includes all mothers equally. We came to this analysis as a result of angry mothers finally forcing us to recognize their oppression and act to change it. Another factor was a growing awareness of our age chauvinism that was brought about at the insistance of women in the community eighteen years old and under. And finally, having a daycare center available that was controlled by women, all of whom were gay, gave us a forum that allowed us to see how providing childcare was identified with meeting our own needs.

In this case a beginning analysis was far easier than handling the uproar all of our minds were in as we saw the direction that had to be taken. That uproar reached crisis proportions at a Sparky General Meeting that was called by the small collective of women who had been running and staffing the developing daycare center in temporary facilities. Many women attended the meeting who had only just committed themselves to the politics and action of doing childcare. We were confused about our responsibilities, afraid of the confrontation of mothers and full of guilt because of the validity of their anger towards us. Overall was a feeling of powerlessness; we were at a loss for direction. The group was diverse, unorganized except that we all wanted to relate to Sparky and childcare.

All of these feelings had a material effect on the group. An unorganized group has no way to deal effectively with the individual fears and confusions among its members. Even though the general purpose might be accomplished -- in this case, daycare staffing -- political progress by individual members is made almost impossible. With no ways to deal with the problems of people, energies are dissipated that might otherwise be channeled into growth and change.

Fortunately this kind of possible stagnations was avoided when a woman suggested that small groups of childless women be formed to deal with the fears and hassles many people had felt and expressed at that meeting. And we were scared! We felt awkward around kids, and defensive when people who had a lot of experience took over situations easily. We didn't know the "right" way to handle things. We didn't know how to play, how to talk to kids, how to get them to do things. A thousand "what ifs" were in our minds, pigshit and bullshit. And we felt powerless in the adult group.

At the first meeting of our non-biological mothers group we discussed much of this, and drew up a statement of purpose as a first attempt to communicate to the general membership of Sparky. This is our statement (written mid-summer 1972):

Purposes:

1. To raise our consciousness about the oppression of biological mothers and to struggle with one another (in this group) to change our part in that; to not expect biological mothers to have to raise our consciousness of how we oppress them.

2. To decide what our fears and hassles with doing childcare are, and to work out solutions to those with other non-biological mothers.

3. To commit each of ourselves to an established and regular amount of time in childcare each week, that care to be divided between work in a daycare center and in our homes. To discipline and support one another in meeting that committment, and to increasing it over time.

4. To interact with children, not passively as babysitters but positively as people who have responsibility to children; to break down the socialized and pigshit things in our heads and the heads of others that work against that.

5. To build positive relationships with children.

Methods: (Methods under #1 relate to Purpose #1, etc.)

1. Meeting regularly for discussion about childcare, consciousness-raising on the oppression of biological mothers and children.

2. Taking children in our homes for gradually increasing periods of time. Making our homes baby-proof, safe and enjoyable for children to be in. (Examples: poisons locked or out of reach; treasured breakables removed; have things to play with; have some good foods; sleeping places with privacy -- and safety -- for children.)

When taking children in our homes, we will try not to have to work alone; one other of us will help out. This should prevent freakouts (for both adults and children) and backsliding on our responsibilities. It should help us learn what to do faster and make fewer mistakes. It will also solve some problems of one person with more than one child having to be in two places at once.

3. A proportion of the time we commit to childcare will be time put in at Sparky Daycare Center. As a group we will guarantee Sparky 60 hours a week regularly, and members of this group commit ourselves to covering for each other, if any of us can't make her full daycare time committment in a given week. There are ten of us in the group. At present three of us work full time during the hours that Sparky is open.

So that those of us who work during Sparky's hours do not have to put all their childcare time into non-collective, at-home childcare, we are considering setting up nightcare at someone's house one or more nights a week; would announce it in advance. May also try to see that childcare gets done during events that women in general would like to attend (parties, actions, etc.).

4. Once we have started and established as a regular practice our childcare time committment (both at home and at the daycare center) we shall struggle among ourselves, with others, and -- if necessary -- with biological mothers over issues which come out in the process of re-educating ourselves to making childcare a community responsibility. (Example: dealing with the nuclear family socialization that says that biological mothers are the only and ultimate authorities about how their biological children should be treated.)

5. Given that children are people, friendships should develop if we discipline ourselves to spend enough time with different children and if we overcome our own fears and uptightness, so that we can enjoy the people we are with.

Looking back, from this point in the collective's life, we can see both benefits that we didn't anticipate when we formed and, also, some weaknesses in the ways we've been operating.

Among the benefits, the first is that we've all found it much easier than we expected for us to begin making childcare a natural and basic part of our lives. Most of us are inviting children to be with us in our homes on a frequent, if irregular, basis in addition to the scheduled institutional and non-institutional childcare we're doing.

Second, we've found it to be true -- what AntiMass (see AIAW, Vol. 2, No. 9) writers say both about how politically critical it is for us to become Subjects instead of Objects (actors instead of those acted upon), and about the best work being that which you create out of your own needs. It was out of our needs that we initiated Saturday afternoon, night and overnight care at the center. (The evening care provided by the group of gay and straight men, Monday - Friday, at our center made our plans for those of us who are employed 8-5 unnecessary.) The individual childcare we were doing on weekends made clear to us our own and others' needs for more regular care that would accommodate more children on Saturday afternoons and nights.

Third, organizing ourselves has meant that we have a group voice/work in the daycare center's policymaking and operating. However, we would like to encourage other biologically childless volunteers who are not in a childcare-related collective to organize themselves too, for their own good and the good of the daycare center. Our voices could easily get too loud or heavy among volunteers in the daycare center if we're the only ones organized. (Biological mothers are organized, and since this article was written another non-mothers group has formed.)

Through this group also we've been collectively dealing with our financial responsibilities to childcare. The daycare center we all relate to needs money to run. When it began to get a lot of volunteers (about the time most of us got involved in it) the group organizing the center demanded pledges from all volunteers (not mothers) to be paid monthly on a regular basis. At first they were going to do it by taxing people on the basis of a voluntarily-prepared financial statement. People objected to what they called being "taxed" without having a say in how the "taxing" was done, so the group that was organizing/administering the daycare center decided to just ask people to pledge money out of their own sense of what they could afford. Both because accountability -- for how the books were being kept -- was unclear and sketchy and because some women in our collective were unable to contribute any money, we decided as a collective to contribute a set amount (from money we could hustle out of other people and from ourselves). It turned out later that we were able to get more than that amount together (when people weren't laid off from work) but it didn't seem necessary or desireable for us to put all of that into Sparky since, according to the budget set up and other incoming monies, they didn't need more than that on a regular basis. And, since our collective was organized to do childcare a lot of times and places besides the daycare center, we felt that money was needed for those other responsibilities (like getting equipment, toys, etc.).

As with the time committment thing, we've found that dealing with the money responsibility both to the daycare center and to each other (there are both working class and middle class women in our collective, women who live collectively and alone, women with debts and without, women employed and not) in a collective way has been better than leaving each woman to hassle with it individually. It helps both in terms of confrontations (with people outside the group) and in terms of our helping deal with the class and time differentials amongst us within the collective.

Another daycare need we found was pressing was transportation. Currently we pick up and take home three children regularly, rotating among those of us who have, or can hustle up, the time and a car.

Finally, as a collective we've been doing physical maintainance -- cleaning, repair, and some of the building work -- for the daycare center. Childcare for us has meant not only spending time with the children, but also taking on other tasks -- including learning new skills related to their safety, health and development. Many of us had for some time wanted, for example, to do household repairs, electrical and carpentry work, but until the needs of the daycare center and other childcare committments demanded those skills we did not apply ourselves to them.

There are at least two large criticisms that we have of ourselves and our work thus far. We have not yet (we've been a collective for four months) struggled enough with other biologically childless women and men to get them to begin to meet their childcare responsibilities. We see that everyone has childcare responsibilities and, in a society with an evolved political consciousness, childcare would be shared by everyone and so no burden for anyone.

Also it has been difficult for us to make sure that the three women (of the ten of us) who live alone do not have to do childcare work alone (see #2 under Methods, above). The former are hesitant to ask the women who live collectively for help out of fear that the latter will wind up having to do double their share. We need to do more to prevent this. Maybe going outside our group for childcare-sharing work is the answer. Clearly, being able to do childcare with the help of another adult is a luxury most biological mothers can't afford, so it may seem contradictory that we should try to meet that goal. But since we're trying to create a new way of raising/caring for children, we should try to live that new way as much as possible.

*Doris and the Sparkettes is the new name for our collective of non-mothers dealing with childcare. We changed the name when we realized, thru criticism, that the name was offensive to mothers because it sounded like we thought of ourselves as mothers.

1973
WOMEN'S CALENDAR
ORIGINAL GRAPHICS PREPARED AND PRINTED BY WOMEN IN BALTIMORE
$2.00 each for less than five
$1.50 each for bulk orders
All orders must be pre-paid.
Send orders for 1973 Women's Calendar to
12 West 25th St.
Baltimore, Maryland 21218
DIANA PRESS
THE LESBIAN TIDE
A VOICE OF THE LESBIAN/FEMINIST COMMUNITY
sisters subscribe now!
$5.00 in california
$6.00 elsewhere
$ .50 sample copy
send to: tide collective
1124½ n. ogden
los angeles, ca 90046
bulk rates available upon request.

about daycare licensing,

What's the set-up for federal and state funding of daycare centers?

The Office of Economic Opportunity and the Bureau of Health, Education and Welfare both have funds which can be used for daycare but there's endless amounts of requirements that have to be met for centers to qualify. Both of these federal agencies work together as far as daycare is concerned. They both allot so much money to each state annually for daycare but the state can't use that money unless it can come up with "matching funds".

What are "matching funds"?

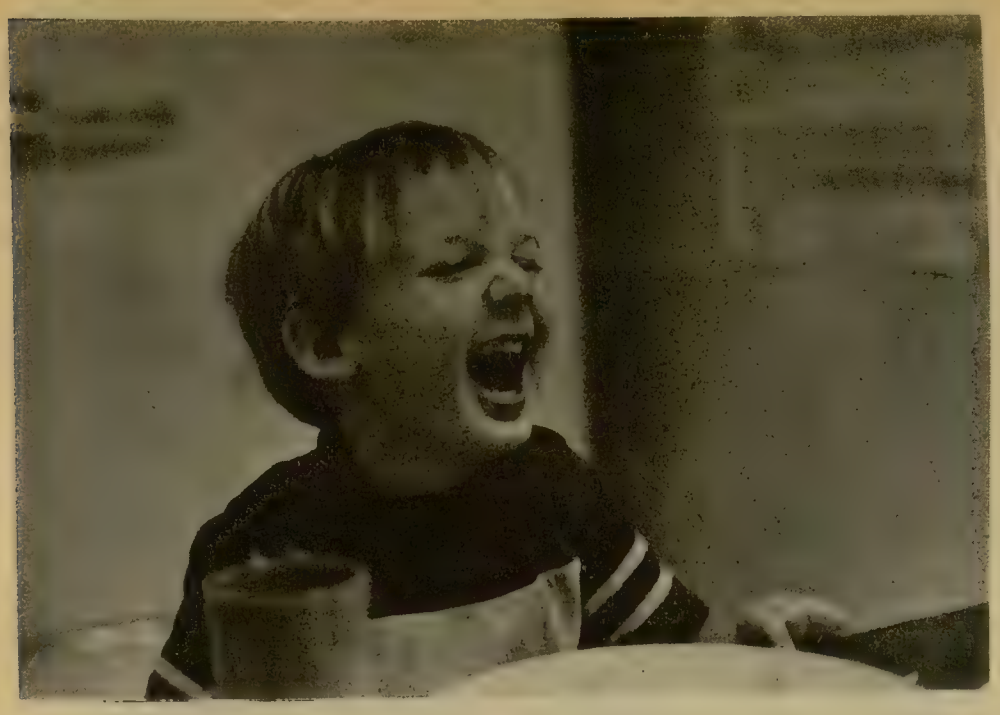
The federal gov't won't directly pick up the total bill for anything, so it filters its money through the state. If the state wants to use it, it has to come up with ¼ of the cost - then the federal money - as 3/4 of the amount can be gotten. By the end of the fiscal year (in June) a lot of state's money isn't used up because they haven't matched it. This money is turned into the federal gov't and then given over to different regions around the country. (Iowa City's region includes Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, and other midwestern states) The money that's turned back into the federal gov't can be used by a state if it can prove worthy cause. And this money does not have to be matched.

What about Iowa's money?

In 1971 we heard from the head daycare guy here in Iowa that the state board on daycare (they decide what kind of money they're going to get and what they'll use it for) was going to try and get $10,000 and use it for model and demonstration projects around the state. So, a proposal was drawn up for Dum Dum Daycare Center here to use $5,000 of it to expand into a 24 hour free co-operative childcare center. (It was already operating on that basis for 18 hrs.a day) The state was a little hesitant because their head child psychologist and shit hadn't decided yet whether it was ok for infants to stay at the center for 24 hours - and just freaked out on the idea. The proposal anticipated this - and tried to focus on the other aspects that the state wanted to hear about.

What are those aspects?

Well -- what kind of daycare center could be set up for $5,000 and run 24 hours a day for ten months? That was a phenomenally low figure among all the other proposals they'd gotten, since most daycare centers use $5,000 in one month, and they thought that was a real "bargain," like the model housing projects!



How did you acquire space for the centers?

The first 3 co-ops were set up then in church basement spaces that were an awful hassle to get donated. It was a drag - we had to go in to talk to the board of directors of the church or some bullshit and come down with a charity rap about how it's going to be such a charitable deed and all. We couldn't go in and say it was the church's responsibility to give up that space...etc. We had to grovel for it.

Like the year the Episcopal Church got uptight and guilt-ridden over "race relations" and so could have dug a non-white preference center because it was "in".

Yeah, when we were talking to the churches, the "in thing" was being "charitable" to low-income people. It was an advantage then to be in the churches instead of university faculty houses like we are now because the university tries to limit us to its faculty and students. But there are so many problems with the churches' limited space and rules. The houses are pretty "luxurious" or something.

"...if you've gotta grovel, you might as well grovel for a big house.."

Yeah --- and rip-off the university for as much as possible!

What about hassles from the state?

Each of the 3 centers got a letter from the district supervisor (the state is divided up into so many districts and the "daycare consultant" inspects all the daycare centers in their (5 county or so) area) about having children under the age of two. She said how she'd visited them and the state licensing commission had not drawn up rules about kids that age (everything applied to children from 2 to 4 years of age). So since we had babies we would have to get rid of them to keep operating or the states attorney would issue an injunction and shut us down. Anyone who continued would be charged with a misdemeanor. After we got our letters there were all kinds of meetings, and we called the daycare consultant and the state head of daycare to come to a meeting here in Iowa City. Of course, the big guy didn't come and all the responsibility got passed up to him by the three that did come -- and they said they didn't have any power, etc... There were about 200 people there from the daycare centers and the community, and it really sort of freaked them out! We were arguing to stay open and they just didn't have any answers for us. It was either that we might get provisional licenses for one year while the state would re-write the Standards, or that the attorney general would issue the injunctions. As of today the Standards are still not ready so we've been getting temporary licenses. (All the two-year olds from the time of the letters are over two now!)
The age restriction isn't the only requirement keeping us from having permanent licenses. All sorts of expensive things have to be done to the buildings. You have the year of your temporary license to get the things done or they can issue an injunction against you -- but we've just been applying for temporary ones and not getting any flack --yet.
The standards for a permanent license are outrageous. None of them apply to personal or emotional needs of the kids. It's all about building improvements, fire escapes, sprinkler systems, toilets, etc... three toilets for every kid or some bullshit like that -- plus other things that cost a lot of money that daycare centers fronted or run by big business can afford (and profit off of) and that places trying to provide free childcare don't have the money for.

Did you ever get anymore money after that big $5,000 "gift"?

The 5,000 grant that Dum-Dum got was just a one shot thing and the next year when we tried to get some money it was too hard, too much red tape and bullshit and no one pursued it.

What about donations to the centers?

The 75% matching arrangement also applies within the state. Any money donated to the center can be matched by the state with 75% state funds. That sounds like a good deal but it takes a long time and is so much red tape that alot of times it's impossible to do. Also, that money doesn't just come to the center. It's given to the county social services (welfare) and it can only be given out in the name of a child in the center. So, to get that money people with kids have to be interviewed by the head of social services (in the county) and explain need and cost. You make up a figure, $50 or $75 a month per child and go in and apply. Say, if there's $300 available in the funds for matching -- you have to have the parents of ten kids go in and do this every month.

And does all this hinge on your license?

Yeah -- to get <u>any</u> money you have to be licensed -- and getting even a temporary one is a hassle. The standards for licensing can be gotten from the State Department of Social Services. In Iowa that's in Des Moines and they have lots of copies that they're just glad to send you. When we decided we'd have to at least appear as if we were going to get licensed,we started finding out different "advantages" to getting licensed. I really think that if it's economically possible it's best to try and do without the license but if you need or want federal funds you have to be licensed -- and that includes getting the hot lunch program, which is about the best deal, even though it's incredible red tape. You have to record each grocery item you buy, and how it's used. But

funding & regulations

they will reimburse you for all of it - up to 3 meals and 3 snacks a day if you're open, say, 18 to 24 hours. So, you need at least a temporary license.

Are there any additional licensing requirements?

Yeah - another thing you have to do to get a license is have everybody who works at the center fill out a health form verifying a physical examination. The children have to have them, too. They really just want the forms sent in.
Also fire regulations - the fire marshall has to come out and inspect the building. The board of health has to inspect it too. So after you shell out all the bucks and get an approval you send them into the daycare branch of the State Social Services. Meanwhile the regional daycare consultant is coming around to your center every now and then to look it over and report back to the state about whether or not you should be licensed. The consultant here, Pat Huxol, was the one who "recommended" that the centers were not "operating legally" because of the two-year olds. I think it was partly her responsibility that that hassle came down in the first place -- but in a lot of ways she tried to help us. She pointed out different places and ways to get things and money that we needed. She told us about Operation Mainstream and the Neighborhood Youth Corps. Those are different federal gov't projects providing jobs for low-income people of different ages. People eligible for the different projects can be employed in different community things, like daycare, and get their salary paid by the gov't. So, if you need the help, you can get staff people for the center. We've had people get those kinds of jobs doing the hot lunch program work. I think those things should be ripped off as much as possible. Those jobs should be falsified and the people should be getting the money -- regardless of what kind of work (if any) that they're actually doing.

Where do requirements for licensing come from?

The federal gov't sets up a 17 page booklet of requirements for daycare centers and the state expounds on it and makes it a little tighter. The federal ones are pretty vague and are used as an outline by the state. One of the newest ones is "parental involvement," and they require that the parents be involved in the daycare center -- this is the hip thing of the year. There are all kinds of spacial requirements, etc. too. Like the federal standard will say "adequate indoor and outdoor space for children appropriate to their ages - with separate rooms or areas for cooking, toilets and other purposes ... floors and walls that can be fully cleaned, etc. And the state takes them and makes real picky specifications in about square feet per child, etc. So, if you meet state standards you meet federal ones.

Who administers hot lunch programs?

Hot lunch projects come under the State Department of Public Instruction. Information can be gotten from them. Over that is the Federal Dept. of Agriculture -- and that's where the money comes from. It's matched 75% from Agriculture and 25% from the State Dept. Hot lunch doesn't have to be administered for every particular child. The center has to meet licensing standards, etc. They want to know the economic background of all the people in the center. We can be pretty up front about it since we're trying to serve low income people -- but some of the centers have university people like students and professors and they still get hot lunch money.

How do you get matching funds for donations?

This is for within the state. Say if the Student Senate from the University gives us money they have to set up an ungoing contract with the county board of supervisors and it's just a lot of red tape. Another way to get money is if any ADC parents are in the center and are employed or go to school , especially women on the WIN Program, they can get $75 a month to pay for childcare -- but it's a lot more hassle and shit work for the women on ADC.

What is the WIN Program?

Work Incentive Program for women on welfare to go to school and get a job to get off welfare. I think it's best for women on welfare to just get that daycare money for themselves.

Anything else on licensing?

Yes -- you have to get incorporated. It's a legal thing that any lawyer can tell you how to do and it costs about $20. It just involves a bunch of bullshit -- you have to write out by-laws and articles of incorporation.
Some of the new proposals for standards require at least 6 staff members -- "the nursery's childcare staff and teachers shall have a knowledge of child development and behavior and have the ability to give the children a feeling of security and comfort under the supervision of the executive or operator, be responsible for the guidance and direct childcare." We just got forms at the new daycare center for the workers to fill out. They're part medical and part of them are for the volunteer's work experience with children (and just work experience.) I think that's how they're trying to decide if people are "qualified" and have that "knowledge" of child development. Each center is supposed to keep all kinds of forms on all the kids and workers there on file at all times. "Personal Records for the nursery staff will be complete, including medical reports.. No administrative professional or childcare staff member shall be under the age of 16 or over the age of 70." I imagine that the licensing standards vary from state to state.

What we've been trying to do is meet the requirements that we can without too much hassle, and shying on the ones that are too much hassle or cost too much to meet. So far we've kept temporary licenses by doing that. I don't know how long that'll last.

Every single one of the people I am writing this to is an adult. And in one way or another you oppress children (I'm not saying children don't oppress adults but the certain oppression I'm talking about is one where children don't oppress adults).

I am 12 years old and I am talking about sexual relations between one woman and another in this community. Each one of you, ask yourself if your lover is a child. I'll guarantee you it will be very little if any. It seems as if you consider us someone to be nice to or kiss but when it comes to a sexual relation with us it is out of the question. You can say that the person you get to love just happens to be an adult. I don't see it working that way. Some people may think this is stupid but it is what I think and I don't want to keep it inside anymore.

I know people are trying not to fuck kids over but they do anyway sometime. I would like to feel free to have a sexual relationship with a woman but I don't.

I always seem to like an adult. I think it's cuz I want to be one.

children's liberation

I think children get fucked over a whole lot and they need help. Like adults have people to talk to. Children have to ask themselves what to do and sometimes they don't know what to do. I have my feelings hurt a lot. People probably think this isn't fair but think about other people except yourself and people should think kids do have feelings also. But kids don't like thinking that adults have more power and they can make you leave the room and do other stuff that children don't like to do and I think that maybe some people think that this letter or what do you want to call it. I think this is the heaviest thing that I've ever wrote but somebody had to tell people what it is about and it's hard keeping it inside. I think it had to come out and that's what I think about stuff going on. People probably think different but I'm just telling people what I think is going on.

SERVICE

DIALOGUE

The concept of service has always bothered me but maybe I should explain what I mean by service. I mean by service those projects that we do for a group of people other than ourselves--a group we do not identify with. For instance, the class action workshop was a group of women who offered transportation to welfare mothers to pick up their government surplus food and also sent out welfare handbooks to people on welfare in this county. None of these women were on welfare themselves. Also the Free Medical Clinic in Iowa City, and most of the daycare centers including Sparky where you and I work.

There are two things I really believe in--one is that people needing a service should have control over the service they receive, the other that people should have control over their own labor. Since the workers and users of a service are rarely the same people, it seems to me that someone ends up being screwed. Usually I think it is the people most in need of the service that suffer at the hands of those offering the service who normally have no gut understanding of the need. But there are so many complexities to the issue of daycare and in the past I think volunteers and workers at daycare centers have been forced to hide or give up their feminist politics in order to supply service to people who did not accept them, to work in situations that were offensive to them; to find it impossible to relate to children in any honest way.

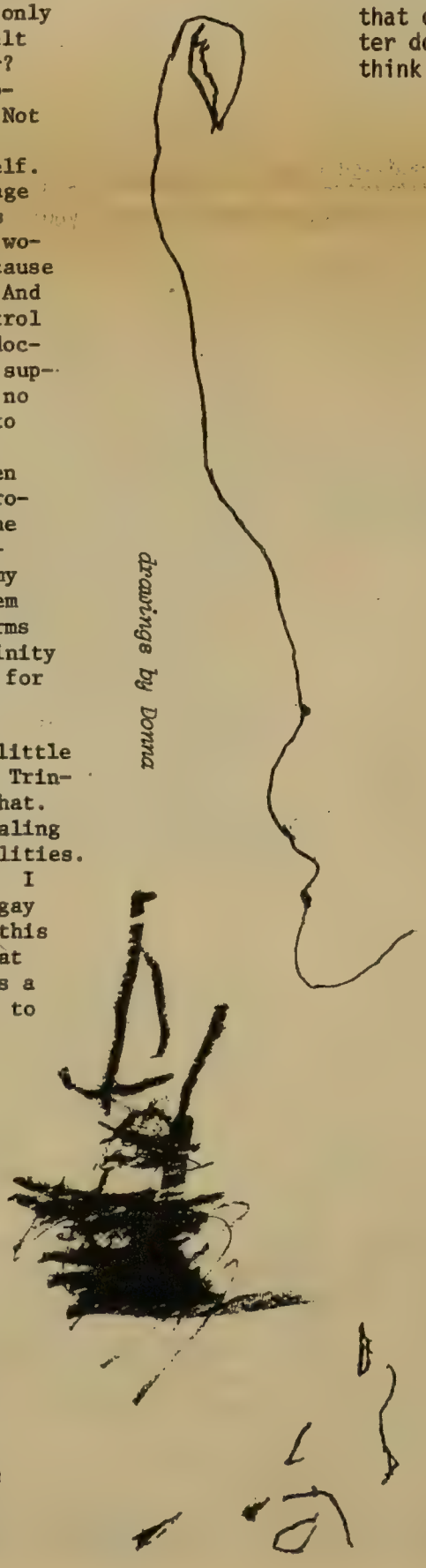
What you say about service is substantiated by my experiences. As you know, I was in the class action workshop and have had a lot of time to observe the Free Medical Clinic because I work there.

My reason for involving myself in class action workshop was that I wanted to work on something that had tangible results. The only real tangible result of that was that I felt that I was doing something. Is that clear? What I'm trying to say is that service projects often make the do-gooder feel good. Not a very good reason for existence.

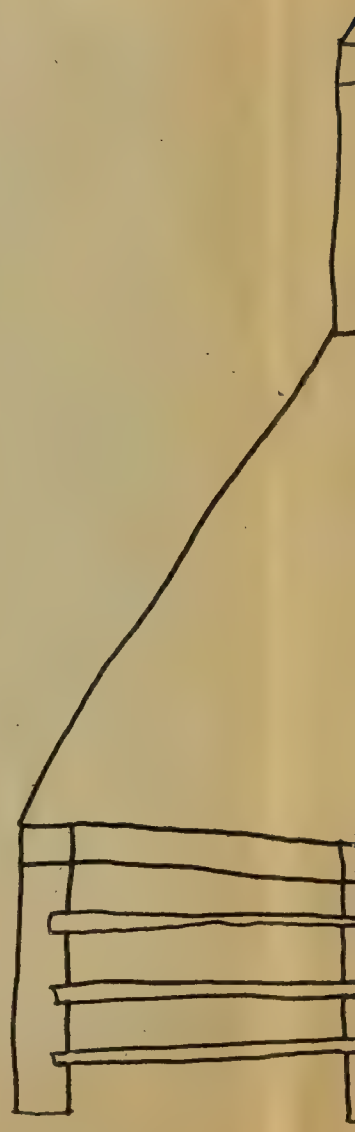
The Free Medical Clinic speaks for itself. It serves no one but the doctors who assuage their guilt on the patients. The Women's Clinic was different, I felt, because the women involved had a stake in the clinic because we needed it and had some control of it. And when we found that we would lose that control by altering its structure (by using male doctors because the female doctors would not support us) we closed it down because it was no longer useful to us. That seems correct to me.

Which brings me to Sparky. I don't even think of it in terms of being a service project, for two reasons. First, it meets the needs of our community by providing childcare for our children. Second, it meets my need to be with children and relate to them in a setting that is more realistic in terms of my life as a gay woman. Working at Trinity was a sham. (Trinity is a daycare center for poor women who need free childcare. It's run by middle-class women who see it as a charitable babysitting service. There's little if any, parent/volunteer communication at Trinity.) I don't feel that Sparky is like that. I need Sparky. It gives me support in dealing with children and my childcare responsibilities. Those two things are separate in my mind. I want to relate to children. Because I'm gay and childless, I'm isolated from them in this society and Sparky helps to break down that isolation. And because I see childcare as a political responsibility, Sparky helps me to begin to meet that responsibility.

Your feeling about Sparky is the same as mine now. I need it too and I get scared when I think about the hassles and disagreements that go on there, particularly the issue of control: should the mothers have final control or should everyone involved have something to say. I get scared because I don't want to lose what I have gained regarding childcare. I don't want to slip back to that thinking of two years ago when I felt it was right that I had the option to do or not do childcare. But there are certain conditions I find oppressive and offensive to work in because I am a feminist and I am gay. And for that reason not having any control in the center would threaten me and could possibly take away or curtail my access to the center as a means of relating to children and the whole work involved in childcare.



drawings by Donna



What I want to say to you in response to your saying that you don't see Sparky as a service daycare center is that some people in the center do and that issue is not by any means settled. I think it is an issue that women without children should be very clear in their heads about 'cause we will have to fight for control and I think we should be sure that we have valid reasons for doing so. So let me try to explain what my reasons are 'cause they relate directly to my negative feelings about service projects.

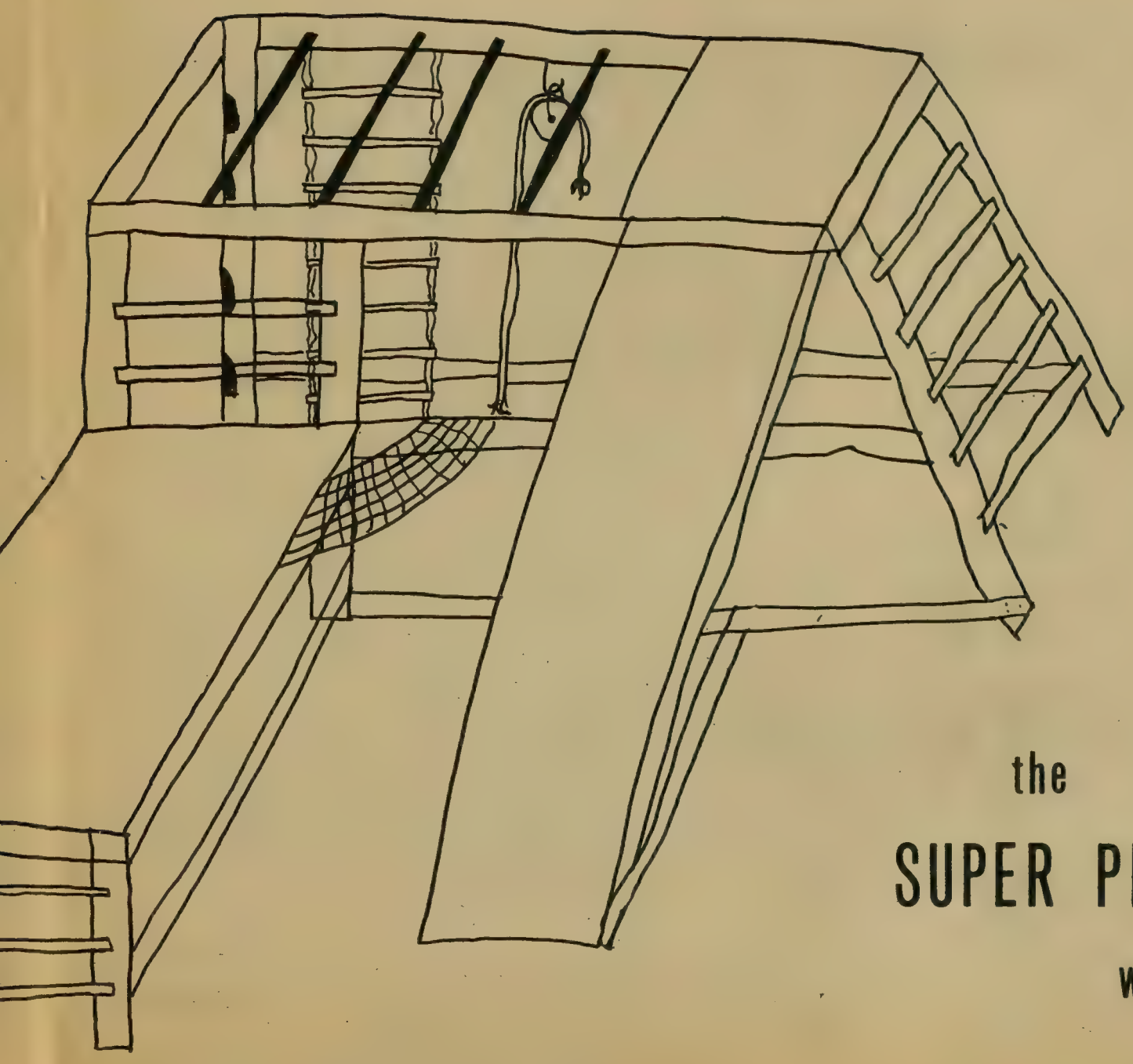
If the mothers had final control in the center and those of us without children worked there to serve mothers and to serve children we would be forced by the situation to see our function as charity. That is really all charity is--a payoff to oppressed people from the guilty. I do understand how in a sense that should seem right--a way of equalizing oppressions. But in reality, I don't think the inequalities are that clear because as women we all carry various scars and many oppressions and any equalizing that is to be done should not be as superficial as putting in time due. I want and I think we can change in a more complete way. For instance, the term non-biological mother has been tossed around a lot since the non-biological mothers group was formed. When we first chose that name, I think we only did so to identify ourselves as women without children. Now it has become used as (or at least interpreted as) us calling ourselves mothers. I can see how offensive that could be to biological mothers--that after doing childcare for a few months, we think we should be referred to as mothers.

However, I think what we should be going toward is in fact being mothers, toward veiwing childcare as a women's issue--crucial to all women, political work that all women must work in and have a stake in--not something we do for those other women or those other women's children, but something we all do for ourselves. The only way I can see this happening is a fairly high level of struggle between women, all the women involved and to totally reject the sentiment that we are responsible for the oppression of mothers. Women without children have not suffered that oppression 'though some have suffered other oppressions and so I can understand how we can rightfully be resented but we have not caused it. We have perhaps perpetuated it just as many mothers have perpetuated the oppression of gay women. I think I want to walk in their shoes if they want to walk in mine. Is any of this clear?

One last note--the service aspect also comes in when you talk about the center serving community children (women's community) since some women in the center want to be serving low-income or working class mothers and not serving the women's community unless particular women meet the financial criteria. As a gay woman, even though I am working class and have many resentments toward middle class women within the women's community, it is important to me to provide childcare for gay mothers and other women in the community whose only options are other centers that are sexist and homosexist.

I agree that the service issue is still hanging. And in part I blame the cumbersome structure. Our last general meeting with the mothers (over a month ago) was pretty positive, I thought. But we've got to meet together more often or we'll fall back on reading meeting minutes and having 4th hand accounts of what "the mothers" think. Sparky is a daycare center that involves kids, mothers and workers--we're interdependant and we might as well accept it and work with that idea.

I don't think that control is the issue. Gay women, by refusing to work with men, are not trying to seize control of Sparky. And mothers, by dictating certain policies which concern their children, are not seizing control. I think it's of highest importance that we all continue to speak from our needs and to listen to the needs of everyone. I don't want to be on either end of a power struggle. I want to be free to speak and be heard and I want that for everyone involved in Sparky.



Next weekend we are going to begin building the SUPER PLAYTHING. we designed it by gathering ideas from Big Rock Candy Mountain (published 6 times/yr by Portola Institute Inc., 1115 Merrill st., Menloe Park, Calif. 94025) and by trying to include in it as many motor developing things as possible. We hope it will help the kids mature physically, become stronger and give them something to organize their playing around so we won't always have to be stopping fights and destruction.

We were lucky obtaining material. We got the 4x4's from a heavy construction site, the 2x4's we found in a garage, and the 1x2's and plywood we scavenged from houses the city is tearing down because of urban renewal. When working with lumber this thick that must have square ends, you should probably borrow a power saw. It's not that the wood is that hard to saw by hand, but your body naturally slants the saw one way or the other. When sawing through 3 1/2" of wood you may get a difference of 1/2" between one side and the other.

the SUPER PLAYTHING won't be built in a day.

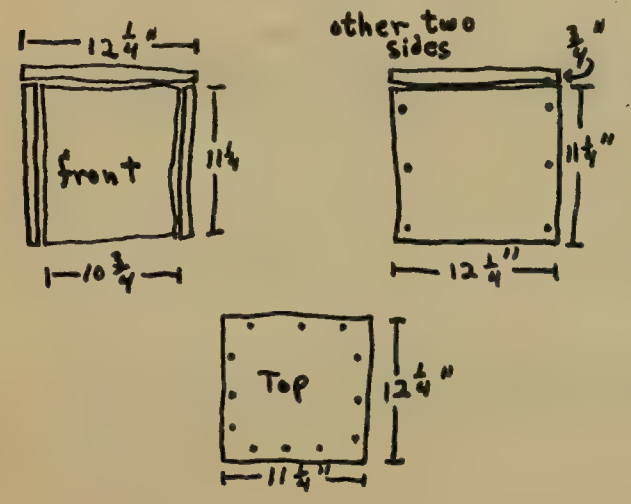
In a day-care center you need furniture and playthings that cost alot of money. One way around that is to build as much stuff as you can yourself.

Wood is expensive, but lumber yards will always let you raid their scrap pile. They might even give you some wood if you say it's for a day-care center, but we haven't had luck with this. For heavier lumber like 4x4's and 2x4's go to a construction site and ask if they have any old or short pieces. Heavy construction sites like high rises or poured concrete buildings even though there's not a stick in them still use lumber for forms, scaffolding and supports. A poured concrete building in the process of being built will have a whole shit load of 4x4's to get rid of.

In our day-care center we decided to build alot of cubes which could double as chairs and building blocks. They work very well; they are sturdy, do not tip and can be made different sizes and painted different colors.

To build a cube you need some one inch thick lumber or sturdy plywood, nails and a blue print. Always draw a plan for everything you build, it helps you think through what will work and what won't and it eliminates mistakes which could cost money by wasting material.

This was the plan for the cubes:



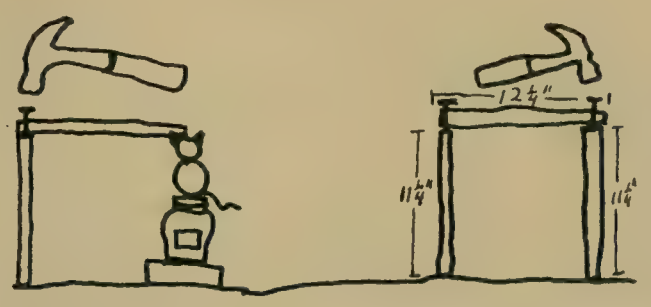
You can get the one inch lumber from scrap, old shelves or buy it and it can be any width depending how big you what the cubes. When you buy lumber you should know that it is named by numbers (2x4) which signifies the width and thickness, but it does not actually measure that (1 3/8x3 3/8").

Lumber is named for what it measures before it is finished and dried.

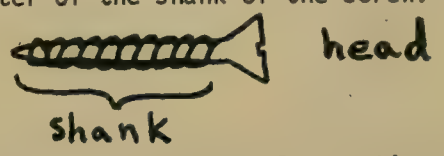
The measurements of our lumber was 3/4" by 11 1/4". First, cut the 5 pieces you need:

top--12 1/4"x11 1/4""
2 sides--11 1/4"x11 1/4"
2 sides--10 3/4"x11 1/4"

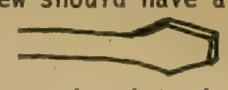
Then nail the top and the two square sides together. When you nail to a board on end like this make sure there is a sturdy surface beneath the upright piece or else some of your effort is wasted. Use something of similar height to prop up the other end of the horizontal piece. Don't fight it.



If you want the joint to be stronger use white glue along with the nails. You can also use screws, but if you do, make it easier for yourself and drill a hole for the screw with a bit slightly smaller than the diameter of the shank of the screw.



There's nothing more frustrating than spending 15 min to get a screw in--one quarter turn at a time. Whenever you are building and a task is that hard, just stop and think. Your are either doing something wrong or you don't have "the right tool for the right job". For instance if it is taking you 15 min to put in a screw, your screwdriver may have the wrong size blade for the slot in the screw; you may be trying to get by without a phillips head screwdriver for a phillips head screw ⊕ ; the blade on your screwdriver is worn or has been sharpened or used as a chisel so it keeps slipping out of the slot (the part fitting into the screw should have a flat edge for gripping);



or the wood you are screwing into is hard wood or has a knot and you should have drilled a hole in the first place and probably put bees wax on the screw.

I have drawn a conclusion from my experience about women tackling problems or tasks in carpentry and mechanics that they have never done before. The first time you do something and need the most luck in having things go smoothly, you will have no luck and everything will go unsmoothly. The reason for this is very logical; you just have to be patient and not get frustrated.

The first time you do something you know the least about it, you might not have the right tools and you'll come across problems in mechanics or a bolt that is stuck and takes more strength than you think you have. Later after you've done this job a couple of times you will have discovered tricks of the trade (either by reading, experience or asking someone) and you will know more about leverage and what tools you need. One more thing: the more jobs you do building, repairing or working on your car, the easier all craft and mechanical work will be to you because you will be learning how to reason mechanically and spacially which will help solve the problems that used to stump you.

Back to the cubes:

Once you have the 2 square sides and top nailed together, nail the other two sides in. For ease in handling turn what you have built on its side like the letter "c", then when you put the other side in you can hold it in place by pressing down on the top square side. Remember the side you are putting in goes from the inside of one square side to the inside of the other making the face of the 10 3/4"x11 1/4" side flush with the edges of the 3 you have already nailed. Now do the same with the last piece of wood which should also measure 10 3/4"x11 1/4" and you're done.

The dialogue (among three women) which follows took place over a period of time -- shortly after a not-quite-confrontation at a general meeting of the day care center workers and some mothers (who were not present, but whose letters to the meeting were read) and some of the gay women who do childcare there.
The three of us who took part in this dialogue decided to have it printed here, even though it no longer represents where we are, because it is a record of a process of struggling amongst ourselves (gay, feminist daycare workers) to better struggle with others important to us (straight and gay mothers).

beginning

I'm a 30 year old middleclass gay woman with regular time and financial commitments to a day care center. My childcare responsibilities are still far from "a way of life."

I am a 30 year old workingclass dyke responsible, with several other women, for the care of a child. I have regular daycare hours and regular financial daycare responsibilities. I also have regular non-institutional childcare responsibilities.

I am newly gay, newly dealing with my working class origins, thirty years old. I have regular time and money committments both to a daycare center and to a child whom I am helping to raise collectively.

As a gay, single woman it took me a while to understand how I think the anger mothers focus against me makes me angry. There is no doubt in my mind that mothers are oppressed. But certainly not <u>because</u> I'm a single, gay woman. Their oppression started long before I came on the scene. Like most women, mothers have been oppressed by men in the heterosexual world. And whether having children was not a choice for mothers, it still was not something urged on them by a single, gay world.

whoever has the privilege shares in the oppression

But that's not really hearing the mother who is speaking. It's not that you're priviledged being a single woman, it's that your're priviledged not to do 24 hour day care. And having control over some of your 24 hours has more importance than having social approval which you can do nothing with.

Social approval really means the ease with which you handle your economic life and the safety with which you live your public and private life.

This is a privilege hard won by lesbians who came up when there was no support for being a lesbian. We also have to re-win that "control" every day from a heterosexual world that is already <u>always there</u>. The mother doesn't have to fight for that "control" during the time, however piddly, that she can get away from the burders of childcare. I don't know any lesbians about my age who are "old gay" and who aren't also workingclass. Maybe hasty, maybe worth considering.

to

Something about "priority" of oppressions and digging up the past...
Still should listen to experience of women who've been dealing with the oppression longer (old gay vs. new gay).

struggle

<u>But</u> on class oppression that's equally long or longer than gayness (for individual women):"length" would screw mothers as a criterion, since most haven't had children as long as most old gay women have been gay. Do you mean "within an oppression"?

Obviously can't let length screw mothers and one day's oppression is too much, but my suspicion of heterosexual women, oppressed four or five years with kids, <u>setting policy</u> is justified.

But the priviledge is seen only within the context of women struggling to build an equal community of women, because outside that community that time priviledge of single women is piddling compared to the priviledge of men. And that's what keeps getting ignored. That's where the struggle should be but where mothers, by the nature of the greater oppressive power of men, understandably could never begin to make a dent the way they have in the women's community of Iowa City. In the ideal socialist world everyone does daycare. But the fact that men almost never do daycare is oppressive to mothers. And <u>secondly</u> oppressive to the single women and the single, gay women who are (though only recently) shouldering responsibilities to women with children.

among

The double oppression, however, is when women with children ask single, gay women--oppressed in a much different way by men--to work in centers with men in order that their sons won't become too "wimpy" (or their daughters too strong???) The mother who tries to move me to the rear of my oppression with her oppression is fighting a losing battle. I absolutely refuse to do daycare in heterosexual, sexist and homosexist daycare centers in order to right imbalances. I will try to deal with it on my own territory but I'll be damned if I'm stepping back into male territory to do it. You cannot trade one oppression for another and believe anything's gained. When the angry voices have died down, that's still what I have to say.

At present in Sparky Day Care Center "trade" is unappropriate since lesbians are "trading" childcare and it is not clear that mothers are willing to "trade" any struggle on homosexism.

It is possible that lesbians may have to do out-of-institution childcare in order to preserve or create a territory.

ourselves

"Helping balance" that (mother's) oppression is so <u>impermanent</u> (appropos remarks about biological mothers being stuck with the childcare after everybody else gets tired/freaks out/goes away). Part of our conciousness-raising about childcare should include that it should be a <u>way of life</u> for everyone, not just a do-it-in-your-spare-time thing. This applies to our recruiting other people to do childcare, too.

This is true but lesbians are used to dealing with the "helping balance" of heterosexual women. They already control-determine- issues for the movement. True they have not been workingclass straight women, but over homosexism the shit smells the same.

Somehow analyze the structure of dissension....

One lesson well learned through childcare hassles is that the only productive confrontation is in groups and in person. (That's not to say learning doesn't go on in other ways than by confrontation.) Confrontations have to do with politics and politics are never simple. Talking one-to-one after a confrontation tends to so simplify the politics because no one person can represent the variety of struggles in a group. So no headway is made, issues are muddied, and everyone hears 2nd or 5th hand what's been said--open range for gossip and backbiting.

among ourselves (continued)

One-to-one talking, like working out your politics alone and outside of any collective has the disadvantages of (1) not representing the variety of struggles in a group; (2) of not allowing the people involved to hear the different ways a certain event in time has been perceived (factual clarity). Collective or public talking's disadvantage of possibly not exposing all those varieties of political struggle and fact perception --because of the time limits, shyness or intimidation individuals may feel-- can be rectified by careful attention to the matter of hearing everyone. Whereas, when only 2 people speak to each other -- no amount of trying to consider other points of view, life situations, can adequately represent them if those who experience them are absent. The need for collective and public group struggle is clear, but we must do it in a context which does not exclude women with less time (because of work and/or children) from participating--one of the main failings of the women's community in Iowa City.

One of the big problems is having to speak with a loud, urgent voice in order to be heard. We've all learned that in order to get people to understand and/or deal with our oppressions, we have to first convince them we have a voice at all. So when you have to be loud and dramatic and overcome your being used to never having a voice, not everything comes out the way you'd want it to. Not to mention the anger. I don't see any way around that. And people who get blown over a little by such voices should be aware of why and give space to the women speaking. (Unless, of course, their own space is being totally confiscated by the women speaking. Unless these women say things that are so blatantly racist, classist, sexist or homosexist that it threatens whatever space other women have for themselves.) If we only hear the "incorrect" thinking the oppressed are doing, we never hear their oppression.

But maybe it's inevitable and right that every "new" issue re-raise every old issue.

Postscript: Dissension with a genuine attitude of struggle (oppressed people struggling together to unite without oppressing each other) is not destructive. What is destructive is anything which prevents or inhibits that struggle, including (1) assuming that the other is either unwilling or unable either to listen or to change and (2) taking part of the facts or issue for the whole (by listening to gossip instead of verifying the facts, by isolating oneself from others while making judgments and/or taking actions which affect them).
On this issue in this community-- up until very recently--these wrong practices have been the rule rather than the exception. That is beginning to change now and already the benefits are beginning to show. In the most recent daycare meeting there was some indication on many sides for willingness to struggle.

a lesbian mother speaks

Here are a few viewpoints on childcare, based on my experience as the lesbian mother of a four year old girl.

1. Female children need care from dykes, starting from an early age. Development of a child's sexuality and body image starts at infancy, and is much influenced by her physical contact with adults. In the nuclear family, a woman has the status of an object, not an autonomous being and her body communicates this concept of femaleness to her daughter. The child is taught to be passive, feminine, and heterosexual before she reaches school.
A dyke is a better mother than a straight woman in that respect, because a dyke's concept of herself and other women offers the child much more space for the growth and development of aggressiveness, initiative, self-confidence and other dykey qualities.

2. Male supremacy is very uptight about lesbians raising girls; we threaten them. The courts view a lesbian mother as an unwholesome influence on a child, similar to an alcoholic or a prostitute. So a lesbian stands a small chance of keeping custody of her child if her ex-husband, family, or any male institution takes the slightest interest in removing the child. The threat can be used to force a lesbian to raise her daughter "normally" -- that is, to meet male approval. Some women have been driven to desperate lengths to keep their children, such as changing their names and moving out of state.

3. A female child needs good quality care from several women to develop a strong sense of self-worth and independence from her mother. It's real wierd for a child to feel that one person cares intensely for her and no one else gives a shit. She wonders what would happen to her if her mother disappeared, and why no one else bothers with her much. A child who regularly gets positive feedback from several directions is much less easily defeated by a blast of negative energy than is a child who is totally dependent on her mother.

4. Mother's committment to her child.
There is, I believe, an element of choice in motherhood (although I did not "choose" to be oppressed and the choice I made does not justify my oppression), and that is that any mother can choose at any time to abandon her child. A year ago, I did abandon my daughter to the care of her father. I was working and living alone with her and constantly fatigued; I knew no women who would do child care for me (her?). So he took custody of her and she got real messed up. After much soul searching, I realized that I had to try to regain custody of her; I felt that no political involvement could be more meaningful or productive than caring for her. But then I hit the lesbian-mother stumbling block; my chances in court were poor, according to several lawyers. So finally I had to disappear with her. The alternative was to abandon her to the mutilation of a "straight" upbringing -- Barbi dolls, makeup, skirts, kissing up to "Daddy."
In response to the "old gay" view that children are products of hetero relationships and so no responsibility of gay women :
No other woman would do this for her. I regard my decision to care for my daughter as a lesbian-feminist committment. She is not a leftover from a heterosexual relationship; she is a four year old woman, as worthy of my time and energy (and anyone's) as any other woman.

5. Males are unfit to care for female children.

6. I will take no responsibility for the care of male children, and question the motives of women who do take that responsibility.

Notes on becoming "Mother"

You have to learn to fight back!
Wanna go for a ride with me
No ice cream!
You're Neat!
LETS TAKE A NAP
Why do you say? why?
Why do you piss your PANTS
Your boots are on the wrong feet!
!! Now I HAVE EIGHT MOTHERS !!

Teri is a three-year-old child who was living with her biological mother in a collective situation that was intolerable for her: while her mother was happy there, Teri was not compatible with the other people in the collective. She needed another place to live and someone else to live with.

The time it took to evolve a solution for Teri illustrates some things we are gradually becoming more conscious of: that children are people who have individual personalities, and that all adults do not get along with all children (or vice versa) any more than they get along with all other adults. That children are entirely dependent on adults for a long time makes it more difficult to deal with personality conflicts as such: you can't just stay away from a child you are responsible for. You could get someone else to take responsibility for the child, but there are two things that make it real hard. The main one, of course, is that no one is into giving up as much of her self-determination as taking care of a child requires. The other thing is that the mystique of motherhood still haunts us and no biological mother is supposed to not like her child. Even as people give voice to the oppression of mothers and try to take "their share" of responsibility and hassle for the children we have, they are shocked and not understanding of mothers who could want to escape this hassle when hassle is all it is.

Anyway, after much thinking and talking and hassle among adults, a group of people became "mother" to Teri, taking complete responsibility for her. We are a group of eight women. All of us are gay. Five of us are working-class, three are middle-class. We all knew each other, previous to coming together in this group, through the political and social functioning of the women's community here. Some of us merely knew each other, some are good friends, some are lovers. We came together at our first meeting not knowing who would be there -- that meeting that finally happened after Teri's mother came to us and declared her desperation-- but we found that it was a reasonable number of people (in fact an amazingly large number considering how much more this is than a committment to daycare) and that we all felt we could work together. We have basic agreements in theory on things like good foods being important for children, teaching her to be strong and independent, teaching her to be a dyke not a lady, teaching her that her mind and body are integral and that her sexuality is part of that whole, etc. We want her to learn these things through secure but non-dependent relationships with many people which we think can be formed by the structure that we have since set up for her.

Actually, that structure was real simple and easy. We had a meeting, and there were eight of us, so we could each take responsibility for one day a week (with a double-up), just once a week, and we each put in $2 a month into expenses, that's not too much... We constructed a bedroom for her in the basement of the living collective of two in our group and moved her into the daycare center where we all work. In order for the adults to communicate across this structure, we have a logbook that accompanies Teri and her toothbrush wherever they go, and scheduled meetings twice a month to talk about things. And it all seems cool and easy...

? ? Motherhood?
What about Clothes?
$2 a month easy for now
HER TEETH?
No shit Food!
Shall be a DYKE not a LADY!
How are we going to know when she needs a bath?
is one enough? is 8 too many?

...except that Teri is a complicated and needful person whose needs are much more than just those present material ones that are so easily filled. We have become the people who are totally responsible for Teri's mental and emotional well-being as well. That is real frightening. It depends on us whether she is happy, whether she feels loved and how dependent she is. And it is even more frightening to have this responsibility and to be trying to fulfill it by creating a totally new structure. We have an analysis of what we are doing: it is unnecessary, if not damaging, for a child (or any person) to be dependent on one person; the structure of mono-relating is conducive to the develpment of jealousy and possessiveness, which are destructive. Living with many people who are all equally responsible to her, Teri will see many points of view and ways of dealing with things as valid, rather than just one or two. She will be with each adult for short enough periods of time that that time can be enjoyable and not oppressive for either of them in terms of resentment and hostility over constant demands, or constant dependency, or just constant togetherness. And because her "mothers" do not all live in the same house, and have various affiliations throughout the women's community, the situation is in a sense community, rather than individual, responsibility to her. So, we decided she would live in one place four days a week and that would be her home, a base of security for her, and that other days she would visit at other people's houses and relate to a different person each day and that will be a really good way for her to live.

But how do we know? Our well-thought-out analysis is just that: ideas. What we are doing has never been tried extensively. No one is experienced in raising a child until she does it, but the way we are doing it has not even poor tradition to back it up. And much as we may believe in it, it is an experiment whose subject is a little girl whose entire life is dependent on us.. ..and whom we love very much. That is why it is so frightening.

And we have not worked everything out yet even as far as practicalities goes. Raising a child is a long term thing and people have not stated specifically that they plan to stay in Iowa City until she grows up. Since it is unlikely that our whole group will move, going to something else would mean leaving Teri. Money will be a bigger problem as she gets older than it is now. What will be the legal hassles: will one of us have to become her owner, i.e., adopt her, in order for all of us to take care of her? What will happen if there are splits within the group? Because it is so intensely difficult to set up such a new structure in this society, taking responsibility for Teri is made even more frightening.

My perspective on writing this is that for several months before our group formed, while Teri still lived in her mother's collective, I had been taking care of Teri two nights a week. Only one other woman in the group was relating to her on any regular basis at all, although we all knew her to differing degrees. Now Teri lives in my collective, her room is right next to mine, she shares my bathroom and we are just generally thrown together a lot. Teri knows me better than she knows any of the other women, she has felt closer to me in some ways and more secure with me, and this manifests itself at times in a kind of clinging dependency on me that is a source of worry and some annoyance within our group. I have been criticized for perhaps not discouraging this dependency enough. The consensus of the group now seems to be, however, that it is more a function of our prior relationship than a growing unhealthy relationship now, that it is good that she feels close to one of us, and that eventually she will feel as close to all of us.

Teri is happier now than she was when she lived with her mother's collective -- she is more sociable and more secure. She has been calling our collective "my house" and seems to have relaxed into knowing we are going to be there. It seems as if for now our ideas are working out in practice. And so now we can look ahead...at the next 15 years.

GAY sunshine

announces:
Gay Liberation Book Service
P.O. Box 40397
San Francisco, Calif. 94140
Write for a free price list...

•a lesbian-feminist arts journal•
AMAZON QUARTERLY
•72 pages of fiction, essays, poetry, reviews, art•
one year subscription $4.
(plain wrapper or out of U.S. $5.)
bulk rates: 80¢ per issue
We welcome your correspondence, artwork, manuscripts, contributions.
AMAZON QUARTERLY
554 Valle Vista
Oakland, Ca. 94610

'nother one dialogue

The first letter in this dialogue was read at a Sparky Daycare Center general meeting in response to the decision of the women who have taken responsibility for Teri (see proceeding article) to have her attend Sparky Daycare instead of Dum Dum, the center she attended previously. The dialogue concerns itself with whether or not children of women in the women's community should be at Sparky, whether Sparky should be a center serving the women's community in Iowa City or lower and working class mothers or any combination of the two. At that meeting it was decided that Teri should be at Sparky and none of the women's community children should be asked to leave but the issue is not resolved at this point and the dialogue that follows presents the issue and debate going on over it.

This letter concerns what I consider a blatant rip-off of working and lower class women and children; that is, allowing Teri to attend Sparky.

My understanding is that Sparky exists to provide a service to women and children who have no other options for childcare--ie. working class women.

Teri clearly has other options. She is still a member of DumDum, a privileged position to be in. I just cannot see how anyone can justify her being in Sparky and taking a place so badly needed by working class people. Every woman who staffs Sparky, the women taking responsibility for Teri, and even myself are in very privileged positions. Despite the fact that some of us are from working class backgrounds we have politics that put us at an advantage in being able to provide physically for ourselves. Being able to staff Sparky comes of privilege too--you have time. It seems very clear to me that the people who support Teri's membership in Sparky are using their privilege to provide for an already privileged child and group of people who are taking care of her.

I have heard some arguments why Teri should be there--or can be there. I want to say that I consider some partially valid but any validity is over-ridden by the fact that there are so many working class people who need daycare. One argument is that some of the people will not see Teri except one day a week if she is not in Sparky and this is detrimental to developing any kind of relationship with her, etc. Valid but what about the space she's taking--that seems much more important to me.

Another is the women in the group taking responsibility for Teri want to spend the time they do childcare at Sparky, not working part of the time at DumDum to keep Teri there. I can't see why they would have to spend any less time at Sparky when the hours at DumDum are not very demanding--especially when there are seven women involved and a deal could easily be made with DumDum. Working those extra hours is an inconvenience and, given the membership of DumDum, uncomfortable. It is the privilege of the group not to have to be inconvenienced and uncomfortable--but what of the "inconvenience" a working class woman is subjected to because she has no childcare?

I've heard other arguments but in my mind I always reduce those arguments down to the fact that there are other options for Teri and she is taking the place of another child who has no other place.

As I've written this I've reconsidered my position on Jane, Gladys & Betsy's* being in Sparky. I had thought of it as a different situation than Teri's because of the position they were put in by the change from feminist to a service daycare for working class women and children. However, there are now several openings at DumDum and no waiting list (I don't know the situation at other centers) and they could get in right away. They should have been on the waiting list of some other center long ago. I know it's true that there are only four working class children at this point in Sparky and that Teri, Gladys, Jane & Betsy are not taking places that should go to working class children. I don't know the recruiting situation at Sparky, but I do know there are a lot of working class people who need childcare and Sparky should fill up real fast. I can only see those few children's presence as holding up some one who needs childcare at Sparky so I can't see putting it off until the need arises as a good thing to do. Also, once its upon you to make a decision I can see the temptation as too great to let them remain.

I think Sparky should make it its policy not to allow in any members who have other options for childcare.

I am writing this because I want you to know what my reaction to your letter was. I don't think it is wise to meet with you personally as you suggested because I think that will only increase second and third hand misunderstanding and misinformation. In spite of disadvantages, responding to you by letter has the advantage of being public (I will post a copy at Sparky) and of inviting comment and criticism.

Several people made the following points at last Sunday's meeting. I am repeating the ones I made, share or would like to add. The issue about Teri coming to Sparky has already been settled, but the things in your letter that concern her and which you want to be policy are what I want to talk about.

1. It is offensive to regard all of the people who staff Sparky as privileged. If politics could change class the Chinese Revolution would have been won with ideas....

2. What support the community provides for its members is largely 'moral'. In this society, sharing of material goods comes out of bounty. Lower and working class women do not become privileged when some of this bounty happens their way. A "temporary" privilege, first of all doesn't change your class and secondly, it's like a welfare benefit, with all kinds of strings attached. The money your collective pledges is a good example of a temporary privilege coming out of bounty with strings attached.

3. I pledged money and time to Sparky not because it was to serve lower and working class women but because I had been remiss in childcare responsibilities and I wanted to begin struggling with that in spite of the chaos of the Sparky-Woman Center meeting. I never supported the notion of service and found most of what was said about lower-working class women at that meeting offensive.

4. I got tremendously pissed at your desire to serve lower and working class women you don't yet know, when you refused to hear what lower and working class women, who you do know, wanted. Teri's group is as many lower-working class as middle class women. It is insane to declare those women privileged because they are working with middle class women.

5. Sparky will collapse unless the staff has a stake in its operation. That stake is community children. It is not simply a question of working at DumDum being inconvenient and uncomfortable. Women who have been struggling with class and service re childcare are coming to understand how and why the community should meet its own needs.

6. If I remember correctly, at about the same time as you were digging your class origins with others, I was too. I had more trouble(still have) with internalized classism and shuffling over class than I did with blatant classism. The hardest thing for me to do was to stop trying to learn about class from middleclass women. They have no stake in the analysis you "mutually" come up with. I am assuming from my own experience that trying to deal with this issue alone (alone among middleclass women) has made the going rough and slow for you. It is a mistake to regard "temporary privileges" as having the same effect on women from different classes. This was offensive to the lower and working class women in Teri's group and it is offensive to me as a working class staff member. My commitment of time and money are at a different cost than middleclass women because if Sparky doesn't work, if the community doesn't work, I've got nothing. You are probably discovering, for example, that the education you are receiving is different from the education middle class women are receiving. You will not be able to do quite the same things with your degree as a middle class woman can do--and you will be pissed when people suggest that you can. Again, I am saying this based on my own experience. You may be able to hustle "supports" from middleclass women all your life, and while it will probably fuck up your class consciousness, it won't change your class. It should be obvious to you that I am making the points under #6 as much for myself as for you, but I'm taking the time to write this to you because I believe that the criticisms in your letter come from a distorted class consciousness.

Can I count on you to share the contents of this letter with your collective because I think this response concerns Mary's criticism too. I would only add for her that Teri forced us to deal again with an admittance policy that was never firm and always contained more rhetoric and bullshit than sense.

I welcome a response if you would like to make one, either by letter or in a group. But as I said at the beginning I will not meet with you alone both because of the climate surrounding this question and because the political issues always get watered down when two people "discuss" them.

dialogue cont. on p. 20

* Jane, Gladys and Betsy are children of women considered part of the women's community here.

*The women's ctr.-Sparky meeting was an early meeting of people interested in working at Sparky at which women who hadn't done much childcare were confronted about it.

Cont. dialogue...

You are right about privilege in relation to working-lower class women. We are not privileged in any sense that middle class women are and our politics and working with middle class women doesn't change that position. I know that in ten years my politics will not have changed the way I live. I was saying however that our politics puts us in contact with Sparky--because of that position we have primary access to it. I think my being pissed off at what I saw happening at Sparky made that somewhat unclear.

My main concern is to provide childcare for women and children on as widespread basis as possible. Lower-working class women have the least access to childcare. In my mind these people come first. Children who have other options and more chance to be in childcare are not my concern. It makes no difference that Teri's group has more or as many working class women as middle class women. First, she has exposure to alternate childcare situations--and second, a seven adult to one child ratio doesn't rate anywhere the need as a one adult (mother) to one child(or more) ratio.

You say you "got tremendously pissed at my desire to serve lower and working class women you don't yet know, when you refused to hear what lower and working class women, who you do know, wanted." There are a couple of points I want to make about that. First, I don't want to serve working-lower class women. "Serving" people is romantic bullshit used by privileged groups to relieve their guilt or add a little spice to their lives. As a working class mother I don't want your service because that means you doing it on your terms. It's like if I hear one more middle class woman say, "Lower class people don't want charity"--I think I'll scream. You're damn right we don't want your charity--all those conditions and strings. Charity and service only are good for those dispensing it--ego trips. A good example of "service" or "charity" is what happened with Teri--no one would take her because they were supposed to--it was done to "save" her(social work attitude). But we do want you to do what you're supposed to do--in this case provide childcare because you have extra resources (from being childless). That means do it not because you want to for some reason but because you're supposed to. You have no right to hoard extra resources. In this society there's no name for that kind of giving but it's not "service" or "charity". It sounds real nice to say people should serve themselves first--it doesn't have much basis in reality however if you're a mother--and no basis at all if you're a lower-working class person and mother. What resources do these groups of people have to serve themselves?

A second point I want to make about your statement is about the point that I have refused to hear what lower-working class women I know want. You are wrong--that is all I have heard and I'm sick of it. Mothers have been systematically shut out of Sparky and any community dealings with motherhood. "Those women don't have time to come to meetings and anyway they'd freak out. They shouldn't be here". I want non-mothers to quit making decisions for mothers. The working-lower class non-mothers involved in Sparky fuck me over just as much as middle class non-mothers with their childless options. Which brings me to the point about who should have control over major decisions at Sparky.

I want to point out that we do not live in a revolutionary society. Almost every child at Sparky goes home to her mother every night and ten years from now that's where that child will still be. How childless women who have no concept of what childcare involves can presume to make decisions that affect those mothers is beyond me. And everything that happens in that center affects those mothers lives--it doesn't work out that what happens in daycare and what happens at home are two separate entities. There are all kinds of carryovers from one to the other. At this point mothers have no reason to trust non-mothers no matter how much childcare that non-mother has done. First the childcare that non-mothers do is so minimal and on top of that it is pretty damn atrocious. I don't know any non-mother who does childcare that doesn't do things to or with the children involved that doesn't increase the burden on the mother when the child returns. Of course childless persons can afford to do this since they don't have to deal with the mess later (ie. not giving children naps who need them, feeding them crap instead of balanced food, being careless with safety measures). Then there are the guilt trips laid on mothers by non-mothers. Childless persons who do childcare never have to deal with that--and they are often the ones who lay on the guilt. I could go on and on about why mothers have no reason to trust you.

It is misleading for childless persons who do childcare to call themselves non-biological mothers--the implication is that although biologically you are not mothers, in practice you are. You never will be because you'll never have to experience what mothers must--nor do I think you should have to--but non-biological mother implies that the person has struggled with her oppressiveness and come to a realization of what a mother's oppression is. No childless woman in this community has struggled. Childless women are reinforcing each others oppressiveness and fuck ups. You are defining how you oppress mothers and not listening to what mothers say. When you do struggle and mothers have reason to trust you then control of major decisions should be yours too. But it is up to the mothers to define when that oppression has stopped. It's a long way off as far as I can see.

You have consistently ignored my motherhood in your criticisms. You talk rather glibly about my "hustling supports from middle class women." You can't see that my life and needs are not the same as yours precisely because of my motherhood. I am in the rather uncomfortable position of having to choose between: 1) living/dealing with lower-working class mothers and being oppressed because of my gayness and politics, 2) living/dealing with lower-working class, feminist, gay non-mothers and being oppressed because of my motherhood, 3) living/dealing with middle class mothers and being oppressed because of my class, or 4) living alone. Obviously number one is out for several reasons (it is near impossible to live with only mothers with no help from non-mothers), two is out because I have yet to find a childless person of any class who wants to deal with children. Mothers already burdened with childcare are always the first and often the only ones to help out with children. I will never live alone with a child again if I can help it. The only alternative that has worked out in my life is living with a middle class mother and another woman who is middle class and dealing with childcare. It's not so easy as a pick and choose situation--when you have children it leaves you no room to be fussy. You must take what you can get. You cannot even see through to my oppression as a mother.

You can choose to ignore my needs and the needs of all mothers. And the structure is such in this community (as well as in society at large) that mothers have no power--because you have all the options to pull out anytime you wish. Mothers can do nothing without childcare. You talk about the money from our collective coming out of bounty with strings attached. Don't forget the threat you hold over every mother's head because of the bounty of energy that comes of your being childless and that you can put or not put into childcare as you choose. Mothers haven't forgotten it--it's been used on them too much.

One more thing--I'm sick of non-mothers telling me how I should think. "The reason she wants this or that is because she still wants control over the child. After all, she's a mother and mothers are possessive. Not that they don't have reasons to be possessive...,etc." If I say I don't feel like that you say or assume I'm lying and don't want to admit how I really feel. I can't have a valid reason for anything--I'm a mother. What it comes down to is my real reasons don't fit your plans.

As I was putting this together it occurred to me this is a waste of time because everyone always says, "Well, she's not talking about me. I'm struggling really hard. How can she say that." I want to make it clear that I do mean you--no exceptions exist in this community.

Dec. 27 was the first time I saw your response to my letter. I don't know how long it has existed and if you still feel the way you do on all counts, but I'd like to comment by paragraph and try to tell you how I felt about what you said. I think the key to our differences--yours and mine--I'm not speaking for the community, is over 2 points. One, you say, "My main concern is to provide childcare for women and children on as widespread basis as possible." That is not my main concern for the obvious reason that it is not my main oppression. Two, day care for me is hopelessly bound up with oppressive heterosexuality.

#2 (# means paragraph) We can justify where Teri is; you can criticize where she is. The reality is that she is in Sparky because the women who care for her are in Sparky where they can hope to have some input. In spite of the ratio the women in her group have every reason not to do day care in an environment any more hostile than Sparky.

#3 I think your breakdown about 'service' is very useful. I use that meaning and the bullshit meaning for the same work at different times. June describes that kind of 'suppose to' as 'correct'. Over the issue of lesbians doing childcare, however, it is perfectly reasonable for lesbians to require correct behavior from mothers at the same time as gay mothers require effective childcare from lesbians. When the heterosexual privilege of all mothers begins to fuck me over, I'm not so sure it is correct for me to do institutional childcare for any reason, much less because I have 'extra resources'. It comes as a surprise to me that needing to create--but never getting it together--space to live safely and decently is an extra resource from being childless. I thought it was from being queer for 30 years. I would be very happy not to hoard that resource because as it is now I can count the # of hours a week I devote to shoveling the shit away-not even enjoying the space. Also when I think of resources I think of material resources. It's especially when resources are low that you must serve yourself first. When you talk about correctly serving workingclass mothers I assume you are talking about your own needs. That's what I mean about serving yourself first.

#4 Saying you're sick of hearing from other working and lower class women who have been making criticisms about class and homosexism is a drag. Homosexism has been making me sick all my life. Speaking about this community alone, I am surer that in 10 or 15 years queers will be oppressed in the same ways than that children will go home from daycare to their mothers. In 10 or 15 years we're liable to have 24 hours day care and mothers will be able to go on to something else, like choosing to be gay when it's convenient and choosing not to exercise a gay consciousness when it's not convenient.

#5 Heterosexual mothers and gay mothers know nothing about what affects my life and they don't much care unless as Mary said, it is affecting or will affect the quality of the childcare they're getting. It would be nice not to make any decisions that affected mothers. It would probably be nice if mothers didn't make any decisions that affected my life. Since that's not the reality the decisions at Sparky must be joint. Mothers, by the way, have not been 'systematically excluded' from Sparky. There were mothers at every meeting, more at the most recent meeting than at any other. If your comment comes out of paranoia you might notice that the lesbians keep expecting to be thrown out etc. as in the past. That is another reason for joint decisions. Trust cuts both ways.

It is not clear to me if you mean the Sparky care is minimal and atrocious. I don't think the specifics you gave are true of Sparky. There have been public struggles over mistakes and disagreements, but I wish you would clarify because it is a very serious charge. The a.m. naps (when I am there) are regular,

dialogue cont. p.21

the children eat better than many of us ate when we were children, and people are systematically making repairs and watching for maintenance and play hazards.

I do not know, because I don't have to experience it, the quality of motherhood guilt trips, but lesbians do indeed know about guilt and it doesn't begin when you bear a child. It is precisely this kind of failure of analysis out of which comes the rhetoric of the-absolutely-oppressed that I think results in the kind of tit for tat some of us (including me) have been into. I think it comes out of anger and panic. Frankly, I'm not so hot at analysis, but I've been forced to try it in order to get straight what it is correct for me to do and what it is correct for me to demand.

#6 I agree with you about the name Non-biological mother, for the reasons you gave and for others.

There is no way I am interested in winning the trust of heterosexual women or newly gay mothers who are trying to fuck me over. The MOTHERS' MANIFESTO talks about being forced to pass at welfare. We're all forced to pass at times. Try it without a child. And what if we left it to lesbians to decide when mothers oppressiveness stopped...I think this again is part of a failure of analysis, a failure to see that you and all mothers are oppressors as well as oppressed.

#7 You are right I have ignored your motherhood because I will not let you beat me over the head with it. You have ignored my oppression and the oppression of others for the same reason. When I talk about struggle, I'm talking about getting past this point, not doing childcare that you think is adequate.

I feel pretty sure I did not use the expression 'hustle supports' glibly because I was also speaking about myself. However trying to gap bridges when we're still screaming at each other was a mistake and I'm sorry about it.

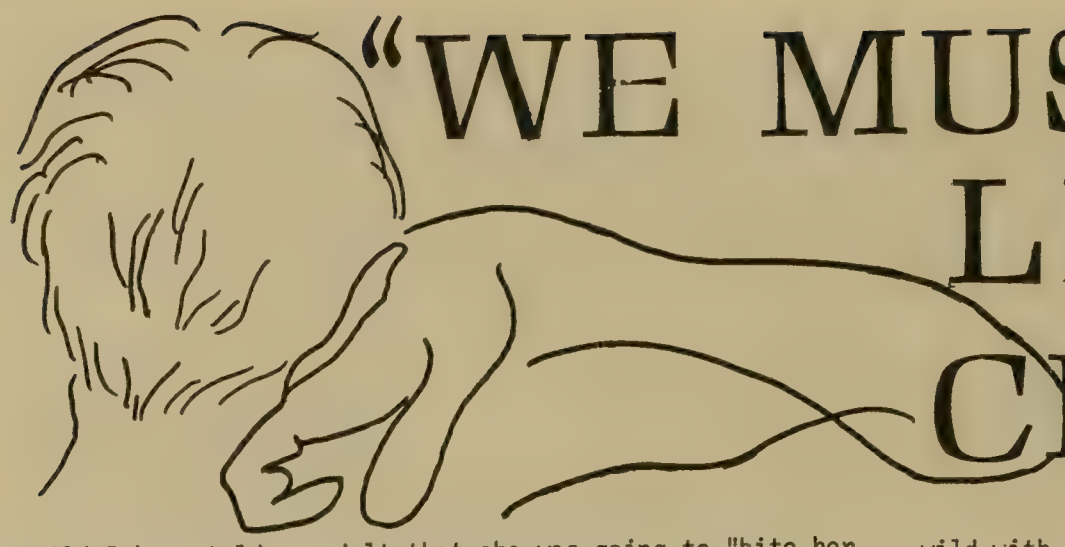
#8 You are right I can choose to ignore your needs and the needs of all mothers and what I struggle with is why, under the circumstances of my life, and the fact that you are already choosing to ignore my needs, why I'm not perfectly justified to do so and fuck correct political analysis.

You compare the structure of this community of 25 or so lesbians with the society at large! That is a failure of analysis so offensive that I don't know where to bite. You say 'mothers have no power-you have all the options to pull out'. Even granting that I have the single option to pull out, power is material. Allowing that we're talking about the crumbs all women are permitted, mothers have the power of institutionalized heterosexuality that enabled a handful of mothers to convince a lesbian community that childcare was their responsibility and then get those lesbians to go around saying that mothers are out numbered and mothers are powerless. It is also institutional heterosexuality that controls the ease with which I can handle my economic life and the safety with which I can live my public and private life. A spin off is getting your head bent.

What you say about the 'bounty of energy that comes from being childless' would be funny if it weren't so serious to both of us. Like I said in the beginniny my energy goes back into-or should be going into- being queer and trying to survive decently in a society that I have to re-create every day and which I can expect to have to re-create for the rest of my life. It may be correct for me to assume childcare responsibilities but not at the expense of the life I've been trying to live in peace for 30 years. Yea, the number of years is real important for me. It's divisive, and tangential and blots out the issues etc. so is being queer forever.

#9 That is why I'm sick of straight women and gay mothers without a gay consciousness trying to force me into their world. they have been doing it all my life.

Your demands, the demands of all mothers are perfectly legitimate, but don't expect me to do your bidding. You fucked me over before you had children and you're fucking me over now. Count on heterosexual women, and heterosexual identified women not to even notice your existence unless it's to get something off you or to criticize the way you live. My needs come first for me and it pisses me off to see the political lesbian community acting on behalf of straight women's needs. you're damn right I do childcare because it suits me. Because I'm willing to create space for Teri to grow in. Because the pressure I've felt from the community is a correct tool and being there was the correct way to struggle. Because if I didn't work where the community was working I would be isolated all over again from even the crumbs of a lesbian subculture. What are lesbians doing in institutional childcare? Another failure of analysis, another impass, more pig-headedness from both of us. I know you mean me in your last paragraph and now you know I mean you and where do we go from here?



"WE MUST LISTEN TO CHILDREN"

A child I know told an adult that she was going to "bite her all over". The adult later smiled at the image of hoards of children attacking adults biting them all over their bodies. This idea is amazingly similar to the actions of women, united against their oppressors, during the Chinese revolution. I do not think the comparison should be taken lightly.

Children have little or no control over money, transportation, their living situation, their time or energy, even their anger is laughed at, ignored or beat out of them. A child says something that is perfectly serious and is laughed at for being cute, then catching on, she or he tries to do it again for a laugh and is rebuffed. Adults talk about children as though they were little animals who aren't quietly hearing every word. And women who would like to bash in the face of men who call them chicks (baby chickens) continue referring to children as kids (baby goats), and on and on.

Being unable to physically survive alone, children are totally subject to the adults that take care of them. This dependency falls largely on mothers who are fed large doses of mystification and guilt (along with who knows what else) to get them into their roles and keep them there in order to provide the necessary labor. At the same time a mother and child begin to know each other and special feelings build up like with a person you've been friends with since grade school. Generally, though, the mother has total responsibility for and control of the child. The mother is oppressed by the institution of motherhood which takes so much time and energy that she begins to lose herself, becoming "Mary's mother" and frequently someones wife as well, but never a person in her own right. In anger and frustration she hits, pleads, screams, and punishes the child so she or he will be good enough to be worth the mother's life, and also so that the child will leave her alone, get off her back. The child responds to this overt oppression by trying to "be good" though she or he can never quite make it, by anger/screaming,crying, fighting, and by sneaking around to get what she or he wants. Children usually learn pretty fast how much or how little power they actually have, when to shuffle, how to get by and do the best they can,etc.

Children are oppressed by adults and at the same time are used as instruments for the oppression of mothers. What should be a very nice friendship turns into a complicated love/hate mess.

Many adults are beginning to relate to their passive oppression of mothers in allowing this to happen and are doing childcare as one approach to changing the institution which oppresses mothers (and by association all women). And they are now being confronted with their oppression of children. Some women freak out when they realize that they are doing to children what has been done to them, they are the enemy too. Others simply dig in and begin to try to change things. All make mistakes.

The first reaction is usually total permissiveness, a desperate illogical fear of doing something oppressive leads to allowing and sometimes even encouraging children to pick up adults worst habits. Children are allowed to smoke and drink beer (children have small livers which can't deal with these things very well), regulate all their own sleeping and eating habits, and destroy everything in sight. Coughing, sickly, grouchy, obnoxious tyrants begin making enormous demands on shocked adults who forget that children don't have all the information and experience necessary to make many decisions, and they sometimes go wild with power totally unconcerned with other people.

The state many adults seem to be in now may be a reaction to this or may simply be another approach but it seems to be a pretty widespread situation. Having total control, many adults now seem to be struggling with the problem of the oppression of children with a different form of adult chauvinism: the child as a political experiment rather than a person, with the adult political ideology imposed on the child, not by example but by force: emotional and/or physical. Girls, for example, should not wear dresses, sounds familiar in reverse. With male children this sort of thing is just as devastating. The female is told it's good to be tough and strong and to fight for her rights " don't be whimpy ". He, in the next sentence, is told to be whimpy, be passive, wear dresses, be quiet and submissive. If she hits him she's applauded, if he pushes her down he's a bully. But all of this totally disregards two real people struggling to live together: fairness is often neglected in favor of a political abstraction.

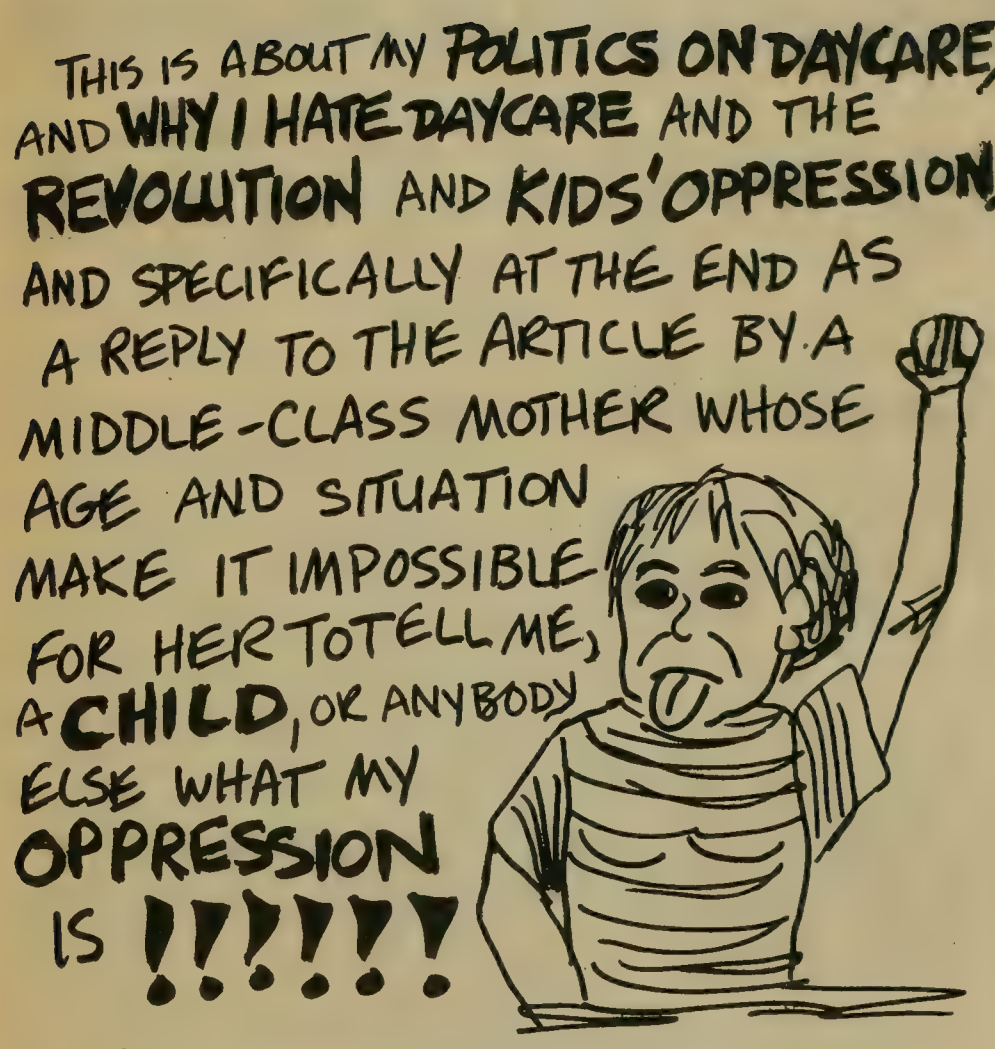
School and television and the whole rest of the world is telling the male to be macho and the female to be whimpy, but just telling them and trying to enforce the opposite isn't working. She wants people to know she's a girl, she's proud of being female. And people rebel against being taught to be weak so he's lost, ignored if he's passive, rejected if he's agressive. Those are the only two alternatives that we have so far been able to give them.

Children don't seem to identify with our ideals, they identify with us. They don't have all the information necessary to sort out the good from the bad. A friend of mine who is almost four years old lives with people who don't smoke. One night I noticed that she was picking up my cigarette butts and trying to smoke them, all the time I was explaining how smoking is bad for you. Adults need to be giving fewer criticisms to children and more to themselves and each other.

It seems necessary that all children be given love and respect and space to grow equal to their repression as a severely oppressed class of people. With male children this is amazingly difficult, perhaps because there are so many privileges attached to traditional male behavior and so few men who are decent models. For male children living within a gay women's community this can become especially difficult. If a male child constantly hears that all males are hated he will learn not only to hate himself but also the people who taught him. If he is constantly rejected simply for being male he will see no reason to struggle, or to try to be different. There are a few adult males who have shown by virtue of consistently assuming responsibility for children over extended periods of time that they are sincere. It seems that we must begin to judge their efforts with the same degree of trust that we hope for from children and other people that we ourselves oppress, putting faith in actions rather than words. Male children sometimes choose to relate to male adults and feel it is unfair that they live with all women and no men. To a gay mother this is a frightening problem. A child is not loved more or less by a mother because of what sex she or he is but simply as a special person with unique needs. Those needs for male children are often not met by other gay women except in the most limited ways and with some resentment, not liking, for example to be touched by male children but enjoying being touched by female children. But it seems that we teach children their roles by treating them differently rather than treating them as individuals within an oppressed class.

It seems that we must begin to deal with our oppressiveness in the ways we've learned and been taught to analyze our oppression. We must listen to children. It was a child who told me that he didn't like being called a kid, he only told me once. A screaming child is trying to say something, we must listen to childrens anger; not demand explanations when we're criticized; try to share our privileges equally with children; remember that with children too the inability to articulate does not mean an inability to think or to hear and understand. We should allow children to spend time alone with each other, safe from eavesdropping adults (although their physical safety must be considered too); and encourage and support their unity with each other in struggling with their oppressors.

With these sorts of cross references we can begin to deal with such every day situations as the similarity of an adult ripping off a record and a child sneaking a forbidden toy. Children cannot write down their feelings to help each other understand and unite against their oppression. They are totally at our mercy. It seems that learning to use power fairly is something never taught in this society, something that women are struggling hard to teach themselves. With children this necessity for fairness is urgent because they learn our oppressiveness as they suffer from it. We cannot afford to be any more liberal or less critical with ourselves than we are with people we consider to be our enemies.


THIS IS ABOUT MY POLITICS ON DAYCARE, AND WHY I HATE DAYCARE AND THE REVOLUTION AND KIDS' OPPRESSION, AND SPECIFICALLY AT THE END AS A REPLY TO THE ARTICLE BY A MIDDLE-CLASS MOTHER WHOSE AGE AND SITUATION MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HER TO TELL ME, A CHILD, OR ANYBODY ELSE WHAT MY OPPRESSION IS !!!!!!

I'm a fourteen-year-old working-class dyke, and I hate daycare. That's how I've always felt about it and I always fucked it off until just a few months ago when I moved into a community where the daycare issue was real heavy. I started doing daycare only because I knew that if I didn't do daycare I would get shit from every woman in the community.

It took me about a month before I started realizing my responsibilities towards other working class women, especially the gay feminist working class women in my community, but I still hate daycare.

When I do daycare, I try to look happy about it and try to think up things for the kids to do. You might say that is hypocritical of me and that I should be honest with the kids. Being honest with kids is important, but what are you supposed to say? I hate watching you? I suppose I don't hate kidcare, period, but doing it for 10 or 15 kids at one time with only one other volunteer can really be a drag sometimes. I really think it's fucked up to hate daycare, but watching one kid at a time is easier for me, and more enjoyable. But I am committed to struggling and want to get into daycare more.

I try to look at the bright side of things, like I live in a fairly small city, and there's not a whole lot to do, and it takes up a lot of my time. And there's usually some neat women volunteers around to talk to.

Another reason for the way I feel about daycare is that I've really resented doing daycare for these women whose kids come from their heterosexual relationships. I, as a gay woman who doesn't want kids, am offended by their heterosexual practices and committments.

What I want to see is free daycare everywhere for women and their kids. Like, my mother has to take her youngest kid, (out of six) to work with her everyday from early in the morning until late at night which isn't fair to her or him. And she has it pretty good, because she works in a place where she can depend on others to help her, and she won't lose her job. In most cases it's no job or high babysitting rates.

I think it's real important and necessary for women to be confronted about the daycare issue because that's the only way that anything is going to happen with daycare. That was the case with me and others in this community. Where I grew up there wasn't any free daycare, or anything near free. My mother shelled out eighty bucks a month for my little brother, alone. That's not counting all the money she dished out for the rest of her six kids. Or for the food she bought, or for the clothes she bought, or for her own labor! Skilled workers get paid for the labor they put out besides charges for parts, etc... and if my mother had been paid for her 19 years of labor she would be set. Instead she got SET six times.

When I grew up I hated babysitters and school because it meant being around perfect strangers. I understand how kids get freaked out about being around strange people that change several times a day, and I think it's good for kids to relate to a group of women, and bad to be dependent on one, like a mother. They should be able to relate freely and not be controlled by the mother.

We women are still the ones responsible for daycare, and that's real shit, but if I had a kid I wouldn't want a male to be caring for her because at this time there isn't one single male who I think is responsible enough to not fuck her head up and give her any bullshit lines. I'm not trying to hide the real world from kids, but we're all around these fucked up people enough and when kids go to public school they're going to get enough bullshit and enough lines to last them til eternity. And also they need a political consciousness, too, and they should get it early. They'll need it to fight off the crap that'll be coming down on them. I want kids to be struggling to become fighters for liberation. Kids are sick of taking shit and pretty soon if we get our shit together it's gonna come a tumbling down and people better realize it fast. I have this vision of a revolutionary class of kids and blacks and dykes and mothers and everybody that's gonna be TOOOOO MUCH!

And I don't want to hear anybody who's not a kid, even oppressed mothers, tell about my oppression. I can't get jobs, I can't go to bars, I can't even hitch hike, I can't drive. I'm controlled by the snap of a finger, a signature on a paper, and the point of a gun. And that's only a PART of my oppression. Not one word in the "adult" article on children's oppression speaks of MY oppression, as a 14 year old dyke, trying to live independently. Any adult who wants to write about kid's oppression better come to the kids to find out, and we want every bit of the royalties, sweetie. And I won't talk to men who come around. I'm a child, honey, and I'm a WOMAN. AND I GET OFF ON IT!

Right now daycare is really important to me, but I still hate the actual work, which is unfortunate because that's what we need now. THE END.

...it is hard to face things like being Pregnant by yourself.

Finding out you are pregnant when you are not married is one of the most frightening experiences a girl could ever go through.

I am an unwed mother. My son is one year of age now and I would like to express to the readers some of my feelings throughout my pregnancy.

I was 16 when I got pregnant and I had no real parents to turn to. I went from foster homes to other ones. The father of my child wanted to get married but my fears of divorce pretty much set us on two separate paths.

I never had the problem of telling my parents as I have already explained. But I had sisters to tell and to me it was a very hard thing to do. Mainly because I had no idea how they would feel towards me (although that really made no difference). But it is hard to face things like being pregnant by yourself.

Throughout my pregnancy I had people telling me to give my baby up. He would have a better home. He would have both parents and that I couldn't take on that much responsibility by myself. I also had people telling me to keep my baby. He was my own and it would hurt me mentally if I were to give him up.

Having all these suggestions being pushed on you at this point is very hard on a person.

I lived in a house with a family while I was pregnant as I had no money. I helped clean house and that paid for my room and board. I ended up getting well attached to the family and they pretty well helped me make my decision.

The thoughts that so often entered my head during this time were -- could I handle the responsibility of a baby? Would I be put down by people? Could I love my baby without feeling a resentment toward him because I would be more tied down?

Illegitimate children are pretty well accepted in today's society but there are still a few people who frown on me. Who think I am taking on too much. Not too many people, but those who do really don't know me or my son.

We are both happy and I have never regretted keeping him. There are times when kids get on your nerves and I go through those times just as every other parent does. But that is to be expected. Kids won't ever change -- I'm sure I did the same when I was small.

It costs me more to live, keeping my son, but I realized it would before I ever gave birth to him.

I feel that if more girls were given the choice to keep their babies or give them up without being pushed one way or the other -- whether they are married or not -- things would work better for the girl as well as the baby -- because she would have made her own decision and therefore would not have such a resentment towards her decision.

I am very happy at my decision even if I still am considered young. Age really doesn't matter. It's how much love you have to offer and I feel I have more than enough for my son.

a black mother talks about daycare: an interview

Q: You were around when free daycare got started in Iowa City, right? I wasn't into that. Could you tell me how you heard about it and how you felt about it?
A: It's hard to start out with just the free daycare movement. The free daycare movement seemed to come out of the other one, the movement with University preschools and with cooperative daycare, where you could give 8 hours a week and then it's free, otherwise it's pro-rated: the amount of money that you paid being according to the amount of time that you could put in. It was like the national movement of daycare centers, with fairly middle class and university women doing a daycare thing, so I guess my first impression is like I had of the whole movement -- it was only inclusive for people like those people that started it. It didn't go outside the immediate group.

Q: Could you explain in what ways you are not part of that, what your situation is?
A: My situation is different in a way. Well, I am a student. I wasn't always a student, so in the past when daycare started I was not only a black woman and an unmarried woman but I was on welfare. That gave us a total dichotomy between myself and the people who ran and populated daycare centers. So, while I am a student right now, that's a real unimportant part of describing me. So I guess I would still have a major difference from the rest in being from a whole different background and situation from white middle class student women.

Q: So they got theirs started. Did they make any overtures to you to get into it or anything? Or did you just know about it?
A: Well, being black in a white university community, you do have a sort of pull from the more radical elements to get involved. So I was approached by the university people to participate, and I'm sure other black women with children here have been wooed to participate. Mostly without success because black women are not real hipped up on letting highly "political" types take care of their children.

Q: So there was this dichotomy between you and the "hip" university community who were getting this together. And so they told you about it? Did they come and say, 'Do you want to do this?' or did you kinda just cool it from that or what?
A: I guess the first people aren't the same people that we would be talking about if we talked about the existing Sparky community or something like that, because the first group of people -- ad hoc committees for dealing with children -- were some of the people who are outside the community that we talk about; but they were middle class women, and some of them were married and had black children, and I guess that's what the immediate negative reaction that came from single black women on campus was dealing with--these people that had black children that were white, because it was real hard for black women to trust their kids to people that would take a child knowing that they couldn't give them the kind of future that they need, the kind of identity and everything, and so you aren't going to give your own kids to them to do the same things they're going to do to the black kids they adopted. So in the very beginning, back in '67, those kinds of people were involved in trying to set up day care. They weren't real successful but those were the first people that approached black women.

Q: Would you like to run down your politics about how you feel about that?
A: Well, it's just that, you know, we haven't gotten to the point where we're all people yet. I mean, that's ridiculous. That's just real superfluous to talk about it even. White middle class people, (and even upper class, especially around here, they are professors and so start to leave the middle class with those kinds of salaries.) But any white person hard as you might try, it's hard to figure out what it's like to be black, and all the empathy in the world isn't what you need. And this child grows up and they need more blackness than the child in the ghetto because the child in the ghetto does at least see other black people. This child is going to grow up knowing that everything he sees good in the whole world is white and then there's nothing that the parent can tell him that's going to change that, because children see what we do and how we act and not what we say. So tell them that black people are really worthwhile and they don't even see any, you know, it just doesn't settle right in their stomachs. It'd be like in the early '60s when they said the talk about equality without doing anything about it, when you could tell a child that the child next to him was equal yet that child couldn't go into the same restaurants or couldn't go to the same schools, had to go to inferior <u>everything</u>, I mean to that child the <u>words</u> were <u>meaningless</u>. And that's the same thing that happens to black kids that grow up in white families is that you can't <u>say</u> enough to take the place of what's actually going on in his life -- that he was <u>saved</u> from being in an institution by a wonderful white family that sends him to <u>wonderful</u> white schools to sit by nice little pretty white children, and then that parent is going to make some effort to say, you know, your difference shouldn't matter -- that right there is negative. It's saying even though you're not the same as us you can strive to be like us. The whole thing is real messed up. We haven't gotten to the point yet that people can take cross-cultural things like that. I don't think that's always the case, but it's the case when a person from a majority society is taking a minority child. I say that there's a difference because if a white child grew up in a black family, no matter what he <u>lives</u> in America, and there's nothing in the world like being white in America, and nothing you could do at home would take the place of what goes on outside in the world. He <u>knows</u> he's worthwhile cause he goes to school, and he sees the president looks just like him, v.p., and the whole damn senate, and there's nothing that that black family at home could tell that child that that whole world wouldn't erase, so you know, it wouldn't be the same always cross-culturally, but it definitely is when the child comes from a minority culture.

Q: So those daycare centers because they were staffed by whites were no different from putting your child into a white family?
A: Right. Definitely. Any daycare center staffed by white people would be like putting them in a white family. They cannot meet the needs of that child no matter how many of them there are and I see that even putting him in a daycare center---another angle is that people ask you to bring your black child so that the white kids can get used to being around black children, and I think that's a real bunch of shit, because it's like your child isn't really a real person, it's a doll, you buy it for the kids to play with.

Q: Did that actually happen? Can you describe?
A: Oh, yes. We can start out with welfare. When I started out with welfare here in Iowa City, they have their own daycare centers--well people--you couldn't call them daycare centers--babysitter centers, where one women or two women takes care of a group of children from welfare families, and the welfare pays her. And they approached me because I was talking about going back to school, so that I'd have child care that wouldn't cost me, and the person that was sitting for me then, they couldn't certify her for various reasons, and the people that they took me to always came up with the fact that they thought it'd be good for the other kids to be around the little black child. <u>Or</u> if they were hesitant, they weren't sure what the other kids would think having a black child. It was always negative. They always came up with they were always happy to have him, but it was for the sake of the other children. This was something new and it'd be real fun for them. I think that's real detrimental to children to be treated like they're a nonentity, and their only worth is in the goodness that they can bring to other people's lives. If you decide to do that for yourself that's one thing, but for other people to decide that for you, it's real strange. That's the way it was with the first Dum Dum and up and down Melrose Ave with the preschools. The attitude they took...

Q: (Interrupting) This was supposedly from the feminist or women's community?
A: Especially the further down Melrose you got like when it got down to Dum Dum. They were more radical than, say, Melrose Preschool--commercially run and has no pretenses to being cooperative. I had classes by then with people that worked at them. They were teaching assistants and research assistants that had talked to me in classes about bringing my child to daycare. Some of the people from that center did talk to me and said they thought it'd be good to have a black child in there--the other kids, they could learn equality and I don't know what else they were supposed to learn.

Q: And they'd see to it that the black child learned his lesson subtly. (laughing)
A: (Laughing) Yeah, that he was there for the service of mankind and not there for his own...you know, <u>he</u> had nothing to do with himself being there. He was there to be played with. Which is, I don't know, real strange. In those terms they would be totally abhorred and that's not what they had in mind. "How do our children learn if they're not around them?" They learn to be racist without being around them, so I imagine they could probably teach'em other things, too.

Q: You're part of the community of women, made up of gay women in town who have for political reasons broken with those other daycare centers and formed another one, and yet we're still this white daycare center. Can you talk about how you feel about that?
A: Well, I mean that's true, it is a white daycare center so I think that on a personal level--while myself and other women that I know that have talked about daycare and the people that run that daycare center, you know, we can deal with them on a personal and adult level because at this point we pretty much know where we're at as third world women. There isn't a lot of harm that can be done

to our psyches by them. And if I and my other friends felt it happening we'd leave; I mean, we know the difference. A child would not. He'd be subjected to that and if we weren't around we would not know what was happening to him in that center. People can't help being white and being the kind of people they are. I'm not saying that people are just mean and like driving black children nuts, but the job gets done and intentions aren't nearly as important as the effect they're having on the children. And to have that many--especially that place where you have 15 adults around a lot--that many white people supervising black children--I think it'd be bad. It's bad enough black children end up inevitably having to go to school and having white teachers and start to get that later. I guess we can put it off as long as we can--having white supervision. Hopefully, we can send'em to a school where they have black instructors but I don't think we can do that in Iowa City or even in the state of Iowa. There are very few black instructors here. So the possibility that you can do a lot for the child yourself before they get to school is one out. You inevitably run into that authority thing with white people but hopefully, by then, the child will have some background about himself and about what to expect going to school--things you couldn't warn'em about when they go to daycare at 2 or 3 yrs old. I guess the only relationship I can see with white daycare centers' dealing with third world children is that its likened to--and we can learn things from different systems--dealing with black economic development where white people have all

the money and all black people have is human resources, you know, and the ability, of course, to deal with each other that white people don't have. White people can offer facilities and--when possible--financial arrangements. But most of the things they can offer is usually never in the contact stage, where they come in direct contact with those people because that's just a hassle, you know, white people haven't gotten to the point where they can deal with black children or black people on a monetary basis without becoming very discriminating, and--especially monetarily--very racist. So the only thing that daycare centers that are white can offer is space and offer some expertise--if there is any--how to finance daycare centers, how to build them, how to apply for federal funds. As far as populating the daycare center, in a position of authority, I don't think that that should happen at all.

Q: Is there any black daycare at all in Iowa City?

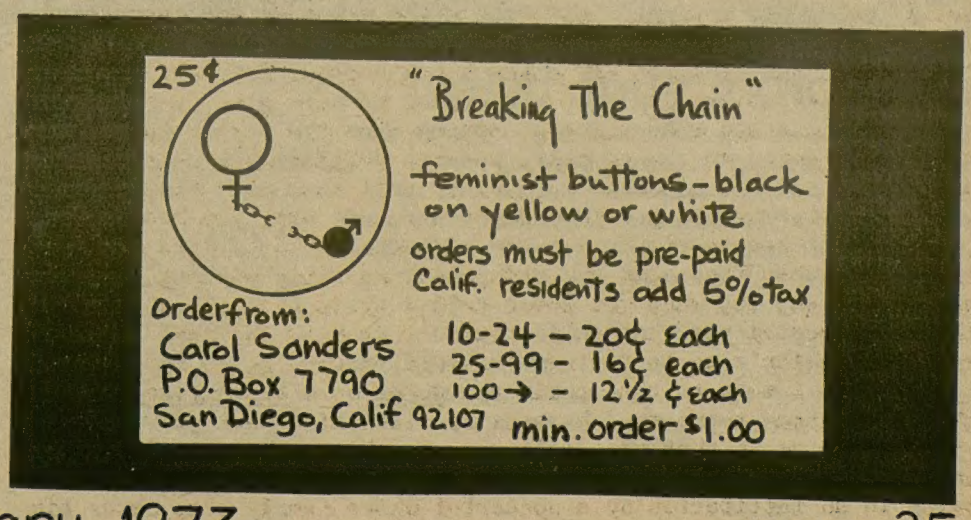
A: No. They were talking about it. There is a group called EBONY SISTERHOOD in Iowa City, of which I'm not a part 'cause they're married. But they're talking about black daycare and setting up something, perhaps. I'm not even sure how far they've gone, even if they've left. Des Moines has a couple and they may have gone down there to see how they run it (if they haven't they should) but that's in the planning stage. Heretofore there haven't been any black children at any age level enough to deal with it. The transient population--here two to four years at the most--at the time--there weren't more than 5 or 6 at any age. It's real hard to set up a daycare center for two or three children. And the other children who've been here forever have always participated in staying home with their mother. (laughing) As far as black students, other students with children, either the wife was at home or they were both students and they would have to have a sitter because, you know, there was nothing they felt any confidence in. With the black student population growing, I think the need for a day care center is becoming eminent. And they'll deal with it, but before there hasn't been more than 10, I think, at one time, you know, black children belonging to university students in any one age group. So there've been very few babies around for people to deal with. They were all either babies of a year or less or else they were children in school.

Q: Do you have any feelings, being working class yourself, about the supposed politics of Sparky to serve or give preference to working class people? Sparky is not run by only middle class people; there are a lot of working class people in it but I don't know if you've ever heard anyone--like Sarah-- talk about how she was real offended when the idea came up of just serving working class people. She thought that idea came just out of middle class guilt and she thought that that was sort of fucked up. Do you have any feelings abut that? Race may come into it so much that it may make it an invalid question.

A: I guess to start off with I should make a statement about the whole middleclass guilt thing. It doesn't bother me so much that middle class people feel guilty if that's not the level they stay on. If we don't get anything done because we think that it's middle class guilt--that's where we get our money and that's where we get some ability to gather some knowledge so we can get rid of 'em. The thing is, if you're going to get as bogged down about their guilt as they are, then, what the hell? They're bogged down in being guilty and you don't want 'em to come over 'cause they're guilty. You don't have no power! And that's one of the major problems with working class and lower class people: they don't have no power. And middle class people have some. They don't have as much as the upper class people, but they have some power, you know. If we could get all the power, that'd be great. But I don't think that should stand in the way of working class people being able to use middle class people to get the things that they want. You don't have to stand around and hold their hand because they're busy wanting to be flagellated because they're guilty. The fact that they're usually very weak by the time they get to that stage--you can channel their energies into something useful. If they're going to stand around being guilty, that takes up a lot of space. And the thing is, if they got nothing better to do, then find something for them to do.

Q: So, like a day care center would be finding something for them to do . . .

A: The thing is that middle class people with a little money can volunteer their time. Working class people can't. They gonna starve if they don't work. So you can't say, "We don't want them around cause they're guilty, we'll go off and start our own day-care center." The problem is, without any money working class people can't do that cause they can't spare the time to sit around all day watching their kids. They might as well be home if they're going to watch their kids. And they could do that at home and watch T.V. The thing is: you've gotta be able to use the resources that are available. And, if you have to--just speaking on a total level of white people: upper, middle, and lower class, not coming in with a racial thing but just as a class thing--the only thing the lower class has that it can use is manipulation. And they've got to be able to manipulate those other classes to get power, to get money, so they can survive. It's not just getting money so you can count on it, but getting money so you can eat; getting your fair share of the pie and the Gross National Product that everyone's so proud of and that lower class people are getting none of and making all of for those big people. If I could get some rich person's money I'd feel good; I wouldn't turn my back and walk away cause he was rich. Being poor, no matter what anybody says, I don't think is very much fun. I see nothing to smile about when you're hungry. Lower class people with children don't like to see their kids go hungry, don't like to see every Christmas go by with their children having nothing, and their days in school start with nothing. That may look like a lot of fun and virtuous to people who are middle class and are poor because they feel like being it for 4 years in school. Turning your back on people because they're middle class is a real luxury in itself. It says something about where your head is and that's just not where most working class people are that are really working class. Because, if you can manipulate those people, by God, do it. I think that starting day care centers and getting money from middle class people and being able to use them, and if you're going to use them in your day care center and you don't like their politics, get rid of the ones that you can, but talk to those other ones. You should be able to tell 'em exactly what you want 'em to do and let 'em do it, because if you're really working class--that's it, you're off working--you're not sitting at a day care center. By all means, don't just say, "because they're there I'll let 'em run my kids crazy because they're middle class." Manipulate 'em, talk to 'em; there's an education level. Tell 'em exactly what you want 'em to do with the kids, what you don't want 'em to do and then, if they don't like that, fine. I think you should have something to say over how they deal with your kids. They should not have anything to say over how the money's spent. Use their expertise, if they know something you don't. Working class people and lower class people don't have resources because it's been kept away from them. To throw away a chance at a resource, I think is pretty foolhardy.



"my Grandma says I don't have to !!" **

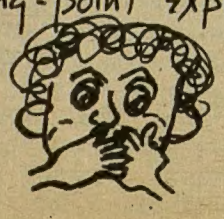
**The twins suddenly started saying this in response to any request even though their grandmothers live miles away and they see them about twice a year.

Gladys pissed her pants so she could have a different change of clothes.

"poop stink!"
"you ding dong!"

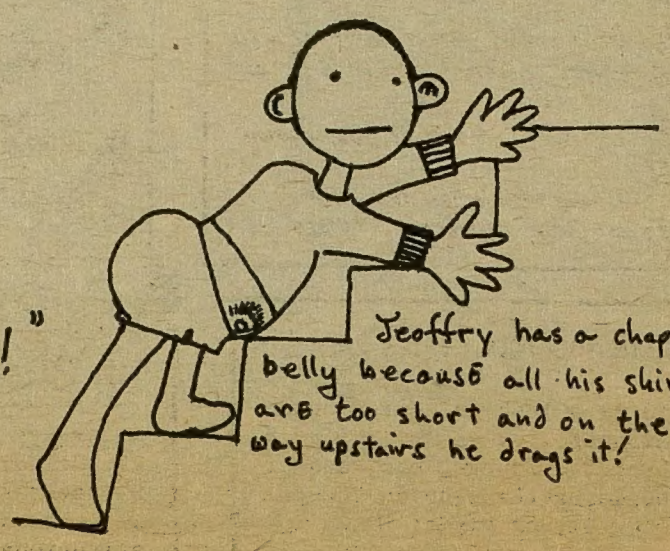
Alice and Sam were fighting all the time. Alice is the daughter of a feminist, gay woman and already has quite a consciousness. She doesn't like Sam much, but it got to the point where we had to cool some of the fighting between them. So, Alice invented this game called 'ghost' where she'd walk around with Sam holding an oversized plastic play hammer looking for ghosts. All of a sudden Alice said, "Sam, there's a ghost on your back". Sam cocked his head and said, "ohhh?" Then Alice said, "Well, we'd better get him." She raised the hammer and hit Sam on the back. He said, "Hey, that's my back." What a con job!

a bunch of women here had a talent show to raise $ for Sparky. Lots of kids came and ran around making noise, which was a hassle at times.. I was in the wings at one point eyeing a twinner across the way. She was fidgeting, so Mary clapped her hands over her mouth. After she quieted down and Mary removed her hands, the twinner kept her own hands pasted across her face — with a bursting-point expression that cracked me up.



"Bye-ya Sea-ya!"

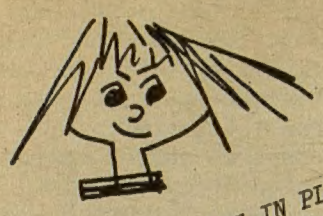
Today the plumber came to daycare. Afterwards Gladys said to Jane, "you be the man, ok?" "ok and I'll go up and fix the potty". Then looking at the space where the stool was ..."Where's the potty?"



Jeoffry has a chapped belly because all his shirts are too short and on the way upstairs he drags it!

"I don't WANT to go potty!"

Teri and I were riding in the car, and she was asking me a whole string of why questions, like she was always doing then. I'd give an answer and she'd say, "Why?" Then I'd explain that, and she'd say "Why?" again. I was trying to be real patient, but pretty soon I got exasperated and said, "Teri, why do you say WHY all the time?" She looked at me with this proud look on her face and said, "I say why ALL DAY LONG!!!"



THE TWINS, BOTH IN PLAID BATHROBES TO JUNE:
" You can't have a bathrobe because you're not a twinner; you're just June."

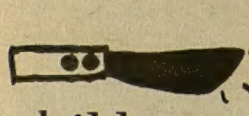
"I'm a baby dyke!"

BIG PERSON: "Why is the potty clogged?"
LITTLE MARY: "Because Joe flushed his underpants down it."

I'm in love with Gladys which has nothing to do with the price of beans especially if you don't know her or her twin sister. They are three years old and remind me of Grocho and Harpo Marx. They're real funny and seem to be spoofing everybody. I walked into daycare yesterday feeling pretty sick. I had diarrhea . Teri said she had it too. She's three and whines and crys a lot but is a tough little woman in her own way. She said her diarrhea was a drag which is what I tell her about her crying and what she tells me in return about everything. I tried to lay down on the couch but Gladys jumped and crawled all over me saying, "I eat diarrhea". Meanwhile Maria and Sidney (adults) were talking about the women's talent show that was coming up. All of a sudden Alice and Mary(2 four yr. olds) closed the big wooden doors between the living room and the hall and stairway that leads upstairs. Then they opened them and began their own women's talent show with Alice's dyky movie act full of punches and strong movements and some theme centered around beating up a man, eating him and vomiting him up. Alice and Mary did a lot of dancing and Gladys and Jane joined in. They all fought the boys off their stage and made them sit in the audience. It was great. Sam is four and he freaked out about not being able to be in the show. Joe is two and didn't really understand the dialectics of what was happening but put on a baseball cap and stalked away. I love those kids.

Teri has been raised on health food, and isn't allowed candy or coke or things that aren't good for her. At a birthday party the other week she was gorging herself on cake, popcorn, punch, and anything else she could get her hands on. One time I went upstairs and passed her sitting alone on the landing stuffing popcorn into her mouth saying over and over, "Shit food! Shit food! Shit food!"

Max the Gorilla lives in Sparky's Basement!

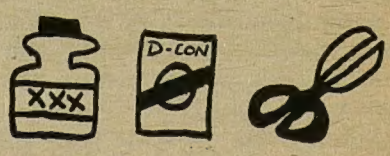


child proof your home!

Every house or apartment should be safe for kids - whether kids live there or not. When I take kids someplace that's set up with only adults in mind, it means more work for me - watching the kids closely and there is no reason for endangering the life or health of a child.

SOME THOUGHTS TO KEEP IN MIND:

1. Don't keep cleaners and other poisonous stuff under the sink. Put all that shit up high, out of reach or locked up.
2. Everyone knows they're supposed to keep medicine out of kids reach but often don't do it. Put a lock on your medicine cabinet. Put razor blades in there too.
3. Don't leave water in a bath tub. Drain it immediately.
4. Keep small dangerous items off the floor that babies might put in their mouths.
5. Tape over wall sockets not being used. Put electrical cords out of reach.
6. Take knobs off gas stoves.
7. Always turn handles of pans in so they don't stick out past the edge of the stove top.
8. Put sharp knives up high.
9. For babies that crawl, put gates on stairs or have some way of blocking them off.
10. Put locks on basement doors or any doors leading to stairs.
11. Paint, turpentine and other "basement stuff" that's poisonous should be put out of reach even if you think kids won't be in in basement.
12. Get rid of tablecloth type things that can be pulled down. Heavy things fall on kids that way.

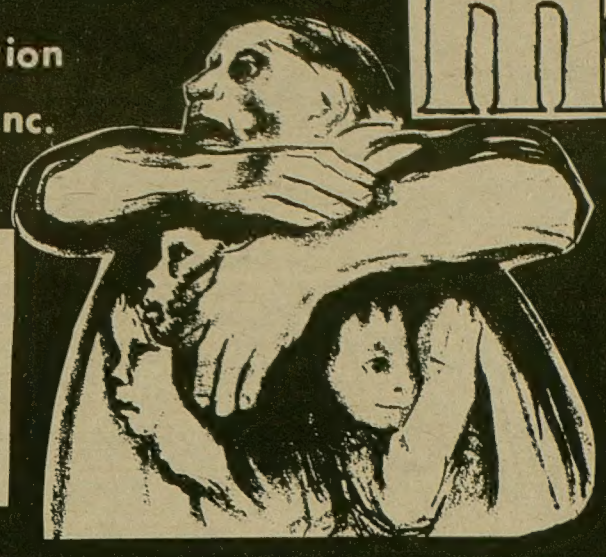


MAMMY

A Third World Women's Publication
Published by RAT Publications Inc.
issue no. 25

1 yr. $3.00
Canada $4.00
Foreign $5.00

To:
R.A.T.
P.O. Box 375
NYC 10009



P.O. Box 567
Venice, California 90291

THE NEWSPAPER/MAGAZINE FOR SINGLE MOTHERS

momma

$3.00/yr. 4.00 inst.

25¢ for "How to Start a Momma Chapter"
Free Complimentary Copies
MOMMA NEEDS YOU!!!!

LIBERA

"...excellent." — Anaïs Nin

We're a new woman's journal with poetry, graphics, articles & fiction.

$1/issue :: $3/3-issue subscription

Libera, Eshleman Hall, U. of Calif.
Berkeley, California. 94720

all women are welcome to read their poetry

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE 1ST AND 2ND ANNUAL ALL WOMENS POETRY READINGS HELD IN IOWA CITY

available april '73 $1
thru: action studies
303 jefferson bldg.
iowa city, iowa 52240

USUAL ISSUES OF AIN'T I A WOMAN? ARE PUBLISHED BY A COLLECTIVE OF RADICAL GAY WOMEN AND REFLECT OUR OPINION AND STRUGGLE, NOT THE WHOLE GAY/WOMEN'S COMMUNITY IN IOWA CITY.

SUBSCRIBE: Ain't I A Woman?

1 year sub-$5.00 ☐
Institutional sub-$20.00 ☐
Complete Volumes #1 ☐
(Both for 1 yr. sub price) #2 ☐
overseas sub-$13.00 ☐

SPECIAL OFFER 2.75 each
Complete Index of Vol. 1+2:
individual $1.00 ☐
institutional $5.00 ☐

BULK:

If your group wants to receive bundles of AIAW? Send 15¢ per copy in advance.

GAY WOMEN IN THE TWIN CITIES AREA:

There is a lesbian center opening in Minneapolis. Plans include a small library, a lounge, etc, and of course, building the lesbian community. Call, write or visit:

LESBIAN RESOURCE CENTER
710 West 22nd Street
Minneapolis, Minn. 55405
(612) 374-2345

A GOOD DEAL!

Witches, Midwives and Nurses:

A History of Women Healers, by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. How women lay healers were suppressed and how the male medical profession rose to dominance. A study in the origins of institutional sexism. 45 pages--illustrated. 75¢ from Glass Mountain Pamphlets, P.O. Box 238, Oyster Bay, N.Y. 11771. Orders must be prepaid.

February

WED 1	WOMEN'S CALENDAR order from Women's Commission Viking Union
THUR 2	Western Washington State College Bellingham Washington 98225

DAUGHTERS, INC., Publishers of Books by Women are, offering $1,000 advance and 15% royalties on the first 3000 copies and proportionate increases on subsequent printings to women who are into writing fiction, specifically. novels. They are not into corporate profits, so...

Parke Bowman/June Arnold
Daughters, Inc.
Plainfield, Vermont 05667
(802) 454-7141

WOMEN OUT OF HISTORY; A HERSTORY ANTHOLOGY
edited by Ann Forfreedom
published by Ann Forfreedom,
($3.50) P.O.Box 25514, L.A., Ca. 90025

An excellent Women's Studies resource, with a long, annotated "Herstory Bibliography". Includes articles about the Amazons, witches, past feminist movements, matriarchies, and modern feminism. Written for today's proud women and strong feminists.

JEWISH LIBERATION PROJECT
150 Fifth Ave. Rm. 700-W
New York, New York 10011

...Six page annotated Bibliography on the Jewish Woman.. lists materials in books, pamphlets, newspaper and magazine articles on the Jewish Woman in Israel, America, the Soviet Jewry struggle, the Holocaust and Resistance, Religion and Law and History and Sociology.

Special bulk-order rate for Women's and Jewish movement groups: $10 for 50 copies, $20 for 100...

LAVENDER WOMAN

THE LESBIAN PAPER of CHICAGO

TO: LAVENDER WOMAN
% BETTY PETERS
2916 N. BURLING
CHICAGO, ILL. 60657

ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTION $3.00

THE SECOND WAVE
Box 303, Kenmore Sq. Station
Boston, Ma. 02215

_____$3* for a year sub (4 issues). Start my sub with issue no.____
_____$.75+$.25 postage for 1 copy of issue no.____
name _____
address _____
city _____
state _____ zip _____
*add $.50 outside of USA; $4.50 airmail overseas
25% discount on 10 or more orders _
renewal ☐ new sub ☐

Let us entertain you...

The fairy follies, (I still say it means faggots when you say fairies, not dykes.) came to Iowa City last weekend. There were violin players, singers, harmonica players, folk dancers, guitaists, stand-up junkie comediennes, and one outstanding bull whip-cracker. Not to mention all the wandering children and assorted roadies and stage hands.

The Iowa City Women's Community had a local talent show for the benefit of Sparky Daycare Center, charging a quarter a head. This was the second annual event with the new added attraction of no-men-allowed. (YEAH!) It was quite well-attended and enjoyed by all, considering all the mistakes made by the co-emcees, and the disappearing music stand, thanks to 4-year-old Alice, (remember Alice?) And oh, yeah, false starts and an un-coordinated lighting system. I loved every minute of it!

The show was followed by a women's dance. Though some women left before the dancing began, there were still about a bazillion women dancing and carousing until they dropped. (These dances are held fairly regularly for all women at 10 S. Gilbert, check the Women's Center for dates and times and bring your own records, etc...)

The talent show, entitled, by the way, "DORIS DAY MEETS THE HEARTBREAK OF PSORIASIS ON MARS," reaped a grand total of $20.00, (are you listening, folks?)

SUBSCRIBE TO AIAW?

yes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Box 1169
Iowa City, Iowa
52240

name

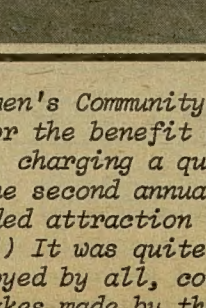
SUB, etc. INFO on P. 27

the furies

lesbian/feminist monthly

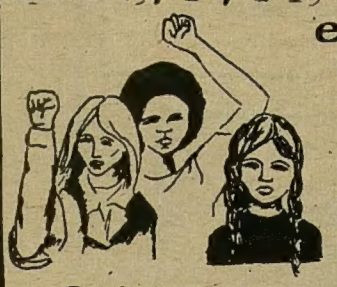
published by the Furies Collective
P.O. Box 8843, S.E. Station, Wash., D.C. 20003 202-544-3940

Gay women who need to talk ol Want info about on-going activities in Iowa City can now talk to gay ♀ by Calling GERI at 351-4582



WEST COAST LESBIAN CONFERENCE

April 13, 14, & 15 **lesbian expression**



Our Art
Our Music
Our Poetry
Our Sexuality
Our Politics
Our Power

for further info:
Barb McLean - 508 N. Alta Vista
Hollywood, California 90036

School got you down?

Then bring it down. A group called Youth Liberation has a packet of pamphlets (incl. How to Start an Underground Paper and Student and Youth Organizing Manual), buttons, and 5 sample high school underground papers. All for only $2. Write to Youth Liberation, 2007 Washtenaw Ave., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

"The Alternative Readers Service wishes to announce that the first issue of the Froggie Hollow Gazette, a six hour tape is now available for free, to the blind, visually handicapped and functionally illiterate.

The first issue contains readings from the Liberation News Service, The Whole Earth Catalogue, The Mother Earth News, The Rolling Stone, and several other radical or underground sources.

Our purpose is two-fold. We are available to read anything the blind or illiterate are hassled with getting through conventional channels. We also hope to become a focus for an embryonic handicapped person's liberation movement.

We need lots of publicity. The group of people we hope to reach is not presently part of any organization so we must depend on readers of the underground press to turn their blind friends on to our service. We would appreciate a small continuing spot in your paper. We would be estatic with a free subscription and could perhaps work out an exchange."

Alternative Readers Service
c/o John Keith
2034 Cornell Rd.
Cleveland, Ohio 44106
ph. (216) 421-7292 or (216) 761-5060